

MEXICO'S THOUGHT POLICE • PUTIN'S PROMISES

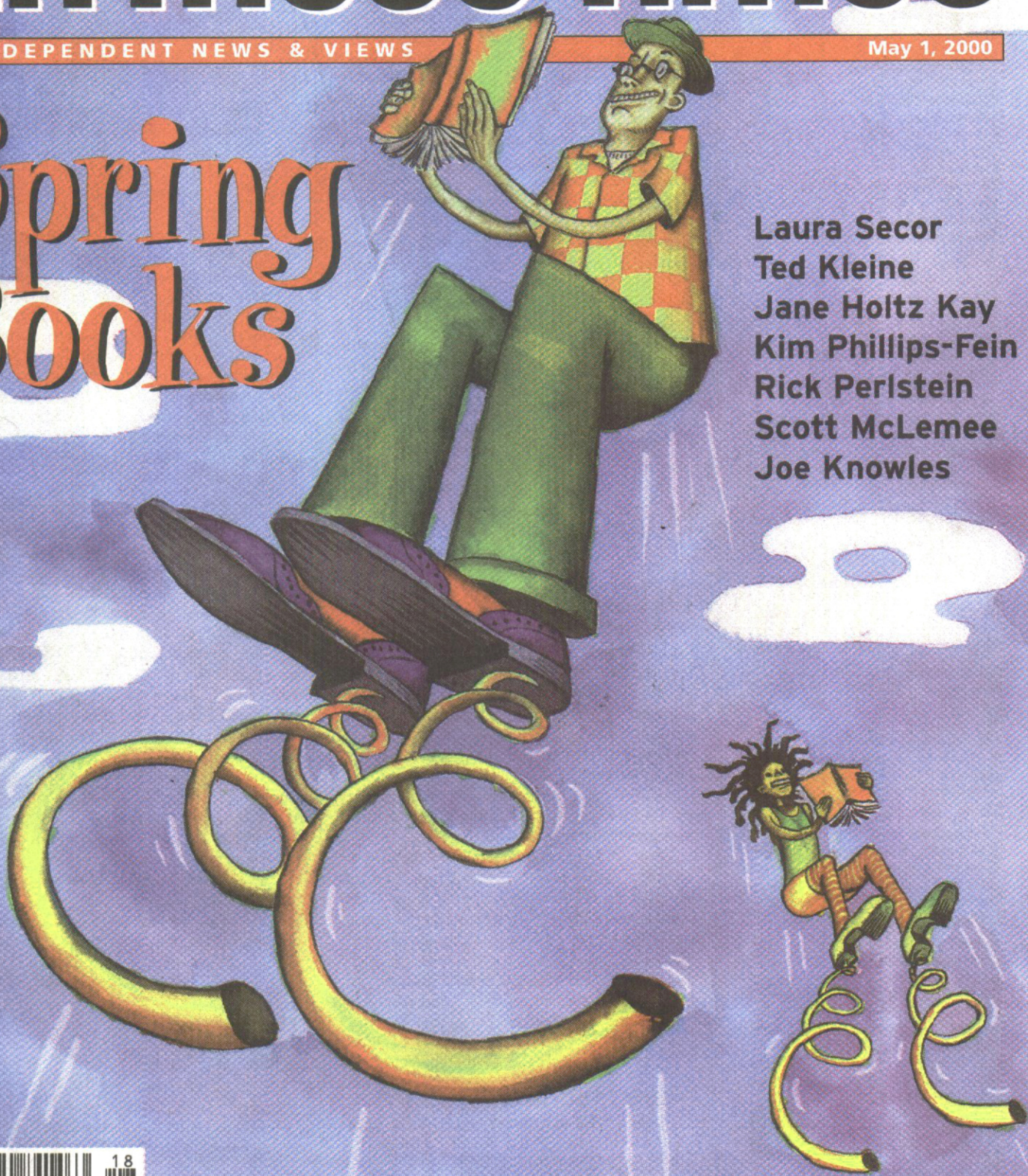
In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

May 1, 2000

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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

"... with liberty and justice for all"

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In These Times (ISSN 0160-5992) is published biweekly by the Institute for Public Affairs, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *In These Times*, 308 E. Hitt St., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. This issue (Vol. 24, No. 11) went to press on March 31, for newsstand sales April 17 to May 1, 2000.

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Subscriptions are \$36.95 a year (\$59 for institutions; \$61.95 Canada; \$75.95 overseas). Call (800) 827-0270.

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Letters

Heil Haider

Neo-Nazis are not known for their intelligence, and Jörg Haider proved that in his 1995 statement describing the SS "as part of the German army which should be honored" ("Isolated, but not Alone," March 20). The SS was not part of the German army (which was still mostly staffed by generals with World War I experience and Weimar-era officers), but a Nazi paramilitary force unto itself, running concentration camps, death squads, the secret police and intelligence forces. Its own army of fanatical killers, the Waffen-SS, died in combat at such a ferocious rate that foreigners were pushed to volunteer. Many SS officers were Austrian, and the country was host to a Waffen-SS officer's school and a mountain-fighting school in the Tyrolean Alps.

I view Haider as a malevolent version of the Harold Hill character in *The Music Man*. He took a rich country that had no problems, manufactured a "crisis," and pushed his loony-bin brotherhood forward. Austria deserves all the condemnation the world has been showering on it. It has been hiding behind the view presented in *The Sound of Music*: a country that resisted Nazism, not one that openly embraced Anschluss.

Jake Christie
Spring Valley, California

Corporate Crusade

Salim Muwakkil's article "Jesse Jackson's New (sic) Crusade" attempts to strike a balance between the left—organize the poor and the ghettos as a power base—and the right—organize the moneymakers and the prevailing powerbrokers (March 20). However, financiers, and the corporations they fund, want not only profits, but control. They want less government regulation and more privatization. And they do very well when they have significant control over government, as they do today.

What's missing from the article is the idea of democracy. Progress—against racism, improving the lives of poor people, establishing basic human rights and empowering unions with the right to organize—has only been realized when masses of people organize to create enough pressure from below to force those in power to grant the masses some of their demands.

The struggle continues.

Henry A. Hicks
Brooklyn, New York

More Madness

Doubts about malathion's safety have been around since the golden age of better living

Project Censored Winners

Once again, *In These Times* has been honored by Project Censored in its annual list of the year's top-25 under-reported news stories.

Seth Ackerman's article "What Was the War For?" (August 8) was cited as the No. 10 best story. Contributing editor Jeffrey St. Clair earned the No. 11 spot with his story, "30 Years After" (August 8), an exposé of the after effects of America's largest nuclear test in Amchitka, Alaska. St. Clair was also honored at No. 13 for his article "Hot Property, Cold Cash" (October 17) about attempts by a U.S. company to turn Russia into the world's nuclear waste dump.

Several *In These Times* contributors also made the list with articles that appeared elsewhere. Diana Johnstone and Jason Vest, who is new to our masthead, were both cited for their coverage of the war with Yugoslavia. Columnist Laura Flanders was honored for her report in *Ms.* magazine about a challenge to the Vatican's special status at the United Nations.

Congratulations to all.

through chemistry ("Malathion Madness," March 20). Rachel Carson's classic *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, has this to say about the commonly used insecticide: "The alleged 'safety' of malathion rests on rather precarious ground, although—as often happens—this was not discovered until the chemical had been in use for several years. ... Already it is known that some organic phosphates (parathion and malathion) increase the toxicity of some drugs used as muscle relaxants, and that several others (again including malathion) markedly increase the sleeping time of barbiturates."

The Rudy Giuliani line on malathion's safety was echoed uncritically by the *New York Times* and other timid mainstream papers. Thank you, *In These Times*, for revealing the tawdry network of agency-industry connections behind this poisonous episode.

Hugh Iglarsh
Sokkie, Illinois

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In These Times

Volume 24, Number 11

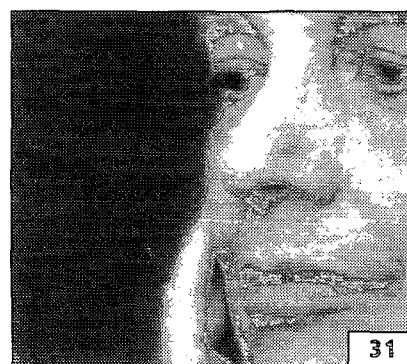
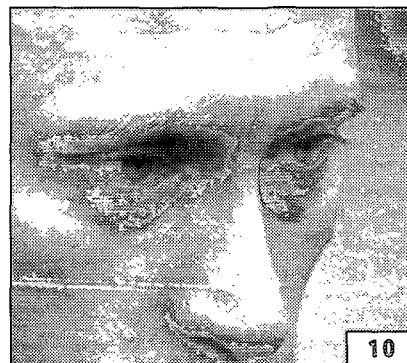
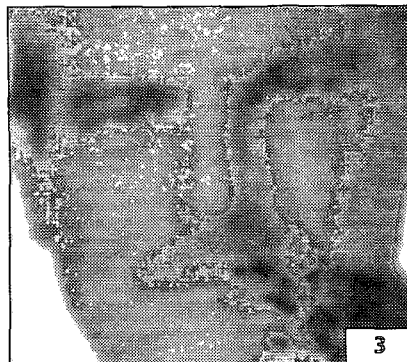
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Cover Illustration: Hugh D'Andrade

Rudy Plays the Race Card

By Salim Muwakkil

The campaign for the seat of retiring New York Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan is notable not just because it pits the combative mayor of the nation's largest city against the first First Lady to seek political office. The contest also offers an object lesson on the current state of American race relations.

Following a flubbed drug sting, an undercover detective killed Patrick Dorismond on March 16. This was the fourth unarmed black man New York police have killed in a little more than a year. But instead of expressing concern about the persistence of these fatal mistakes, or even offering sympathy to the Dorismond family, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani reflexively rushed to support the police. He even tried to justify the behavior of his out-of-control cops by releasing Dorismond's sealed juvenile rap sheet.

The mayor's actions seemed calculated to affront the city's black community, which still is reeling from the March verdict that exonerated the four cops who shot 19 bullets into an unarmed Amadou Diallo in February 1999. Richard Watson was shot in the back by city cops in September of that year, and Malcolm Ferguson was killed by police just days following the Diallo verdict; both men, like Diallo and Dorismond, were armed only with their blackness.

Giuliani apparently has concluded that his senatorial campaign can safely risk alienating voters (mostly urban minorities) infuriated by his pro-police bias, if it gains the support of those (mostly white suburbanites) encouraged by his stance. When not judged by a political calculus, such divisiveness would be incomprehensible—even for the notoriously belligerent Giuliani.

But as a political strategy, it may be a winner. Refusing to buckle under the pressure of African-American activists burnishes Giuliani's image as a no-nonsense mayor, whose tough-on-crime tactics tamed wild-and-woolly New York City. Indeed, it's his major selling

point in the race against Hillary Rodham Clinton. "The worst thing that's going to come out of this is that Rudy's going to appear to be tough on crime and Hillary's going to appear to be too weak on crime," Giuliani adviser Jay Severin told The Associated Press.

Although recent polls suggest the mayor has been hurt by his response to the Dorismond killing, Giuliani thus far is unrepentant. In fact, he has intensified his "race card" tactics by linking Clinton with the Rev. Al Sharpton, the Harlem-based activist who is widely unpopular among white New Yorkers.

Sharpton has been prominent in protesting the spate of police killings and the Giuliani campaign has sought to link Clinton's criticism of the mayor on these police issues with Sharpton's anti-brutality crusades.

In doing so, Giuliani has abandoned all attempts to embrace his city's black constituents. In the 1997 mayoral election, Giuliani got 20 percent of the city's black vote, but a recent poll puts

his black support at just 4 percent. Some of the mayor's most faithful black supporters, including the Rev. Michael Faulkner the Rev. Floyd Flake (a former congressman) have changed their minds. Faulkner is so distressed by Giuliani's irresponsible tactics, he has even called for the mayor's resignation. Despite that growing disenchantment, Giuliani told The Associated Press he has "no regrets."

That the mayor of what was once the country's most liberal city would utilize a race-baiting strategy to garner votes in a Senate campaign is a telling commentary on the fragile state of race relations. Contemporary racial anxieties are concentrated around issues of criminal justice; police violence, racially disparate imprisonment rates and the problem of

Giuliani has abandoned all attempts to embrace his city's black constituents.

racial profiling are becoming the primary civil rights issues of the 21st century.

Racist assumptions fuel the rate of black incarceration and also provide the motive for why police are killing unarmed black men. But those assumptions are not unique to police, they are shared by the culture at large. If New York voters don't reject Giuliani's cynical attempt to exploit those assumptions, it will be an ominous sign. ■

Terry LaBan



Mexico's Thought Police

FBI-trained forces allegedly tortured political dissidents

By Kent Paterson

MEXICO CITY—Controversy is raging in Mexico over the creation and deployment of a new police force largely made up of soldiers. Officially formed to fight drug lords and kidnappers, critics charge that the 5,000-member Federal Preventive Police (PFP) is instead being used by President Ernesto Zedillo to repress political dissent during the runup to elections in July.

The PFP was formed last year under the watch of Francisco Labastida, Mexico's former interior minister and current presidential candidate of the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The PFP's mission is to enforce federal laws against everything from drug trafficking to illegal tree cutting. Last year, President Clinton praised the PFP as a positive step forward in Mexico's campaign against drug traffickers and sanctioned FBI training for the new police unit.

But according to the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the PFP is actually the Mexican government's new counterinsurgency brigade, employing both physical and psychological warfare tactics against government critics. "The government is throwing gasoline on the fire and fanning the flames of social conflict," says Jose Sanchez, a lawyer for six prisoners from Guerrero state who claim PFP officers tortured them.

In November, the PFP abruptly transferred the prisoners from the state penitentiary in Acapulco to the maximum security Puente Grande prison hundreds of miles away in the state of Jalisco. The Mexican government claims that the so-called Acapulco Six are connected to two of the guerrilla groups operating in Guerrero, the Revolutionary Army of the Insurgent People (ERPI) and the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR). But the Acapulco Six deny the charges and consider themselves

political prisoners because of their involvement in the PRD.

Virginia Montes, a PRD member and one of the Acapulco Six, claims that PFP officers tortured her and the other five prisoners during their move to Puente Grande. "Police hit my ears and threatened to kill me and my entire family," Montes says. "They kept asking us for the names of the leaders of the EPR and ERPI, to which we answered, we had no knowledge of anyone in these groups and knew nothing about them." She says the warden of Puente Grande warned the prisoners to keep their mouths shut about the tortures or face solitary confinement.

Montes and her husband Guillermo Martinez—both PRD members—were arrested in Acapulco last October for the murder of fellow party member Marco Antonio Lopez. Lopez was found shot within hours of local elections that toppled the PRI's 70-year hold on the local government. Other PRD members cried that Montes and Martinez were framed, and the police eventually dropped charges. However, federal authorities then filed new charges against Montes for alleged weapons possession. She denies the charge, but was convicted and is now serving 10 years.

Another member of the Acapulco Six, Begnino Guzman, is the leader of the Peasant Organization of the Southern Sierra Madre. In 1995, Guerrero state police shot and killed 17 unarmed farmers and members of his group near the village of Aguas Blancas. Guzman is now serving a 13-year sentence for charges stemming from a protest that resulted in destruction of government property.

Meanwhile, U.S. assistance to police forces in Guerrero is on the rise. Zeferino Torreblanca, mayor of Acapulco, has invited the FBI to train officers this spring. Among the agencies expected to participate in the FBI program is the state police. In recent years, state police agents have been arrested for their involvement in kidnapping rings and have been accused of numerous human rights violations, including robbery, torture and murder. One such incident was Aguas Blancas. The FBI attaché in Mexico City has

declined to comment on U.S. involvement with the PFP or other branches of Mexican law enforcement.

The PFP also has been involved in quashing student protests. In February, 3,000 PFP personnel evicted student strikers from Mexico City's National Autonomous University (UNAM) campus. Critics denounced the move as a violation of Mexico's long tradition of university autonomy. Predictably, members of the PRI, including Labastida, defended the use of the PFP in the UNAM conflict as a last resort.

In the wake of the UNAM strike, Wilfrido Robledo, commander of the



DANIEL AGUILAR/REUTERS

PRI's Francisco Labastida

PFP, was ordered to testify before the Mexican Congress. According to PRD Sen. Felix Salgado Macedonio, secretary of the Mexican Senate's Defense Commission, Congress doesn't even know what the current budget of the PFP is. Salgado says he expects Robledo to testify this spring.

PFP units are now frequently seen on the streets of Mexico City, but their presence has had little effect on the bloodletting between drug rings, which has recently claimed several lives. Nonetheless, the Zedillo administration announced in March that it was setting up five new PFP training academies. ■

Dirty Deeds

Spain wants to extradite Argentina's former dictators

By Travis Lea

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA—Ever since Spanish Judge Baltazar Garzon began investigating crimes against humanity committed by former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, human rights laws across Latin America have been subject to new scrutiny.

From 1976 to 1983, a brutal military regime ruled Argentina with the stated goal of eliminating subversives. Secret forces kidnapped and imprisoned unionists and leftist intellectuals, and subjected them to torture, rape and extermination. Human rights groups estimate that 30,000 people disappeared, some drugged and tossed from airplanes into the sea on infamous "death flights."

Most of the victims were Argentines, but many foreign nationals living in Argentina also suffered the wrath of the "Dirty War." It is for crimes against Spanish citizens living in Argentina

that Garzon is now able to extend the hand of Spanish justice into the Southern Cone.

In November, Garzon issued extradition requests for nearly 100 military leaders. Then President Carlos Menem rejected them outright. Argentine politicians and judges claim their justice system—unlike Chile's—is a strengthening institution, gaining new respect from the public.

Garzon sent a second round of extradition requests to Argentina's newly elected president, Fernando De la Rúa, in January. This time, the complaint was more detailed, including specific information on disappearances and corroborated evidence pertaining to 48 members of the military regime. De la Rúa sent the requests to the courts, where a federal judge rejected them once again, claiming they did not meet the requirements of the existing



Spanish Judge Baltazar Garzon

extradition treaty between Spain and Argentina. Still, De la Rúa says he's delighted that the Spanish judge is carrying out his investigation into human rights abuses, though he adds, "I understand and share Chile's claims to sovereignty."

Like many Argentines, De la Rúa resents the meddling of an old colonial power and claims that justice here works. Argentina is the only country in the region that has carried out trials against its former military leaders.

Today, nearly a dozen former military leaders are serving life sentences. But politicians didn't make that happen. Justice has moved this far thanks to the relentless work of human rights groups that have pushed for new trials concerning the organized kidnapping and adoption of babies born to political prisoners during the Dirty War.

Yet even human rights advocates, like Maria Cristina Caiati of the Center for Legal and Social Studies, recognize that in terms of human rights, "the main difference between the two countries is that in Argentina there has been some degree of justice, whereas in Chile, no."

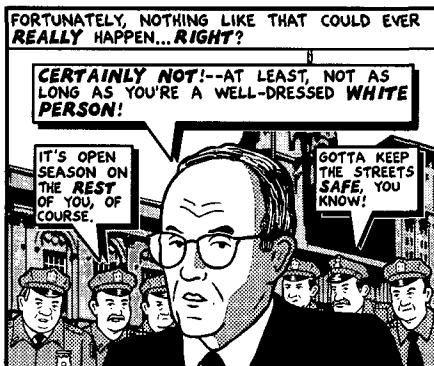
Still, Caiati supports Garzon's requests. If South American dictators are tried in Europe for crimes against humanity, she says, "it would reinforce a lost concept of judicial independence in democratic governments and dictatorships."

There are now efforts underway by Italy, Israel and other countries to prosecute members of the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships. Since disappeared foreign nationals are still not considered officially deceased, and since no other country has granted amnesty to Argentina's ex-dictators, their cases are still considered open. That provides a legal pathway for those countries to pursue justice.

Meanwhile, Argentine judges slowly continue to investigate the systematic kidnapping and adoption of babies born to the Dirty War's victims.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



Federal Prosecutor Adolfo Bagnasco is heading up these new investigations, and has faith in his country's judiciary. "I hope Argentina can send the message to the world that despite its flaws, my country has a serious and effective justice system," he says.

But Caiati notes, "In Argentina, even under a constitutional government, the judiciary has always been susceptible to politics." ■



Party Palace

Bush's lucrative sleepovers

By Nathaniel Heller

WASHINGTON—As George W. Bush's presidential ambitions grew, so did the frequency of overnight stays at the Texas Governor's Mansion by political allies and fundraisers. Beginning in mid-1997, the mansion became a gathering place and springboard for his nascent 2000 campaign, roping in key supporters early in the election cycle.

Altogether, Bush's overnight guests at the mansion have raised more than \$2.2 million to further his presidential candidacy. At least 15 of these guests are members of Bush's elite team of presidential fundraisers—the "Pioneers," who have each raised at least \$100,000 for him—according to the full list of overnight guests from January 1995 through February 2000.

But the overnight visits to the taxpayer-supported mansion may have violated Texas law. State legislation directly prohibits the use of state resources to

support candidates for elected state or national office. The Texas Legislature appropriates approximately \$350,000 per year for the maintenance and operation of the Governor's Mansion.

Many of the overnight guests who stayed at the mansion during that period—most for the first time—were national politicians and fundraisers who would later become key advisers in the Bush campaign. "It's explicit that you can't use state resources to influence an election," says Steve Collins, general counsel of the Texas Legislative Council, a nonpartisan office that assists lawmakers with bill drafting and research. Collins notes that the issue rests on "whether [the overnight visits] were intended to influence the outcome of any election."

When it comes to campaign finance scandals, the Bush campaign has taken the offensive, accusing Vice President Al Gore of being a hypocrite on campaign finance reform by reminding voters of the 1996 Democratic Party scandals. "Al Gore is the one who has rewarded his special interest contributors," Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer said in March, "with overnight stays in the Lincoln Bedroom, with seats on [then-Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown's] trade mission as a quid pro quo."

Bush hosted Ralph Reed and Steve Forbes at the mansion in 1996, and each later donated to Bush's presidential campaign. But the transition from friends and family to leading presidential campaign advisers began in earnest in June 1997, when Wall Street investor Robert Woods Johnson stayed overnight. Johnson, a Pioneer who alone has donated more than \$23,000 to Bush's gubernatorial and presidential campaigns, has become one of Bush's point men for Wall Street fundraising. Lawrence B. Lindsey slept over in October 1997. A former governor

of the Federal Reserve under President Bush, he is now the chief economic adviser to the Bush 2000 campaign. A spokeswoman for Lindsey said that Bush invited him down to Austin after reading one of his books.

New York Gov. George Pataki stayed at the mansion a month later. An early Bush supporter, Pataki helped secure the Texas governor's decisive win in New York on Super Tuesday. Also sleeping over at the mansion that month were



JOEFF DAVIS

George W. Bush denies he broke Texas law.

longtime Bush friends and Pioneer-level fundraisers Craig Stapleton and Brad Freeman—he alone has contributed \$87,000 to Bush's political campaigns.

In December 1997, Stephen Goldsmith, Republican mayor of Indianapolis, Pioneer fundraiser and head of the Bush campaign's domestic policy advisory group, stayed overnight. His visit coincided with another by Stapleton, as well as venerable Washington speechwriter Landon Parvin and frequent mansion guest Don Evans, Bush's perennial fundraiser and presidential campaign finance chairman.

With the infrastructure of a national campaign in place, Bush's next step was to bring in additional Republican figures to gauge his party support nationally. In March 1998, Sen. Charles "Chuck" Hagel (R-Neb.) visited the mansion. Hagel would later become a national chairman of John McCain's campaign. In April, the only guest at the mansion was Sen. John Ashcroft, the conservative Christian senator from Missouri

Joining the Family

New York's Working Families Party made Senate candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton the centerpiece of its state convention in March. She will appear on the party's ballot line in November, alongside her Democratic spot.

The fledgling party—an outgrowth of the New Party, progressive unions and citizens groups like ACORN and Citizen Action—achieved permanent ballot status in 1998 when they won the necessary 50,000 votes. The party now estimates a statewide membership of 125,000.

Working Families co-chairman Bob Master said the party plans to spend \$1 million on Clinton's campaign.

who was considering a presidential run. Ashcroft later endorsed Bush.

In May 1998, Rep. John Kasich (R-Ohio), and lobbyist and former Iowa Rep. Tom Tauke visited the governor. Kasich made a brief presidential run in early 1999, but pulled out of the race to endorse Bush. He is now rumored to be a possible vice presidential choice. Tauke heads Washington lobbying for Bell Atlantic, a phone company with a myriad of regulatory issues before Congress and federal agencies. He is also a political strategist for the Bush presidential campaign, and was offered the job of Bush 2000 campaign manager.

Ted Forstmann, who also visited in May and has given Bush \$20,000 over his political career, is a Wall Street leveraged-buyout expert whose pet public-policy project is school vouchers. Bush was later a speaker at the exclusive "Forstmann Conference" in September

1999, where the guest list included such luminaries as actor Sean Connery, talk-show host Oprah Winfrey, former South African President Nelson Mandela, media titan Rupert Murdoch and Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve. A spokeswoman in Forstmann's office said that Bush invited Forstmann to Austin in May 1998 to discuss education policy.

In July 1998, former Secretary of State George Shultz slept over at the Governor's Mansion. Shultz, who served in the Reagan administration, is a top foreign policy adviser to Bush's campaign. Bush's main foreign policy adviser, Condoleezza Rice, followed Shultz in December. In between Shultz and Rice, money men Stapleton, Freeman and Jim Francis, chairman of the Pioneers, spent a combined total of 12 nights at the mansion.

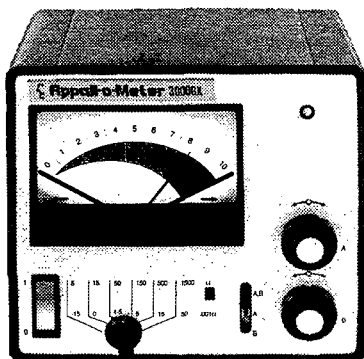
In February 1999, Goldsmith returned and was followed later that month by Dick Cheney, another Bush 2000 foreign policy adviser. Cheney was

President Bush's secretary of defense and is now CEO of Halliburton, a \$9 billion Dallas-based oil company. William Bennett, the elder Bush's drug czar and Reagan's secretary of education, arrived in late March for a visit.

By April 1999, Bush's fundraising machine, first hatched at the mansion in 1997, was in full swing. That month, his money men upped their visits: Evans spent three nights, Freeman four and Stapleton joined Bush for one. The increased visits continued through May, with Stapleton spending four nights, Evans two and Rice one. Shultz followed in June.

Bush has vigorously defended the overnight visits. When McCain confronted him about the issue in March, the governor responded, "These are my friends, John. These are my relatives." ■

Nathaniel Heller is the James R. Soles Fellow at the Center for Public Integrity. A version of this article originally appeared in The Public I.



Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle

Bush Whacker 8.2

The Elián González custody battle isn't the only ludicrous controversy roiling the state of Florida these days. Down in Miami, George H.W. Bush's foreign policy seems to be catching up with him. Ex-Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega, the former U.S. ally jailed in 1990 as a drug trafficker following an invasion of Panama, is now facing the possibility of parole. But not if the ex-president has anything to say about it.

According to Noriega's attorney Frank Rubino, Bush is trying to block his client's release from prison—afraid that the general will come after him seeking revenge. Bush "is in fear for his life," his attorney reportedly told the parole board, "and he believes if General Noriega is released from the prison, that he will come kill him."

Rubino, who told Reuters that "recidivism is not an issue," dismisses Bush's alleged fears as "weird" and "ridiculous." "George Bush right now is

hiding in the closet under a rug, terrified that Noriega will get out and blow him away," Rubino said. "How can he be such a wussy?"

Royal Pain 7.4

Meanwhile in Melbourne, Florida, City Councilwoman Pat Poole is annoying practically everyone but the Klan by opposing plans to name a street after Martin Luther King.

Poole, known to refer to blacks as "those people" in council meetings, says naming a street after the civil rights leader will only lead people to think the street is in "a bad section to go to," as she explained to a reporter from *Florida Today*. "Most of the streets named after King [in other cities] run through the black section," Poole continued. "People tell me that's a dangerous place and to not go there at night."

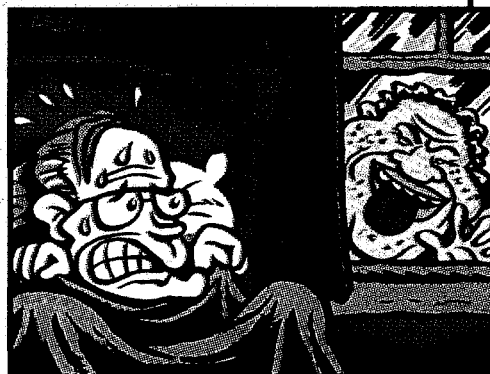
Besides, Poole says, King isn't necessarily a good person to honor anyway. She wonders if he "accomplished things or if he just stirred people up and caused a lot of riots."

Poole maintains that she doesn't have racist feelings toward blacks, but "I'm beginning to get some if they don't quit picking at me all the time."

Race relations would be better, she explained, "if people didn't keep raising how they were abused, how they were slaves. You can't make the community better when you're flaring things up."

Some Like it Hot 6.2

Florida state Rep. George Albright wants to take on an even hotter subject—creating a new state cabinet post, the Secretary of Barbecue. Albright, co-owner of two barbecue restaurants, says House Bill 1737 is no joke. "It's a serious subject," he told *The Associated Press*. "Barbecue is big business in this state."



TERRY LABAN

The Interrogator

By Pat Aufderheide

Many reality filmmakers try to grab viewer attention by sensationalizing the ordinary (tabloid pets!), by staging the grotesque (who wants to marry a millionaire?!), or, more expensively, taking us to extremes of sensation (heart bypass operations!). Errol Morris does it another way. He reveals the weird, the bizarre, the horrifying and the arcane as all-too-human phenomena.

With tenacity, impassivity, ever-precise logic and a strong stomach, Morris gets people to talk to him until they tell him something. Not why they give their pets lavish burials (*Gates of Heaven*), live in a swamp (*Vernon, Florida*), invent testimony that condemns an innocent man to death (*The Thin Blue Line*), parse out secrets of the universe (*A Brief History of Time*) or get into circus rings with dangerous large animals (*Fast, Cheap & Out of Control*)—but who they are inside.

Morris has repeatedly charted interior logics that could be merely quaint and odd, a sort of “America’s Funniest Mental Interiors,” except for the fact that they have enormous real-life implications and consequences. The most dramatic case was *The Thin Blue Line*, in which Morris—who worked for years as an investigator of financial crime and corruption—tracked down a miscarriage of justice in Texas and saved a man’s life. Convicted murderer Randall Adams’ trial was reopened, with Morris’ film as evidence, and he went free. “He later tried to sue me,” Morris said at last year’s Doubletake Documentary Film Festival. “I was very depressed about it for some time, but then my wife told me, ‘Just because he’s innocent doesn’t mean he can’t be an asshole.’”

Morris’ latest film, *Mr. Death*, is about Fred Leuchter, a mousy engineer who has carved out a little career for himself inspecting and redesigning execution equipment. Leuchter explains

this process with a technical precision and love of problem-solving that makes him seem like a slightly morbid but still recognizable model subscriber to *Popular Mechanics*.

This cheerfully obsessive Mr. Fixit is not just a highly specialized repairman. He is also a leading anti-Semitic celebrity. He was hired by Holocaust deniers to sneak into the ruins of Auschwitz and assess whether the ruins really held gas chambers. He concluded



Errol Morris

that the ruins showed no evidence of mass execution, and his report since has become a staple of deniers’ propaganda.

With his trademark implacability, Morris investigates the process of Leuchter’s study. On the way, he uncovers information that not only invalidates the study, but also explains how Leuchter could be so deluded.

As usual in a Morris film, the facts are only the beginning. Disproving the Holocaust denier is only a stop on the road to insight. The problem that Morris—who also studied philosophy in college—is concerned with is how

Leuchter could get to the point where he is the doyen of the world’s moral pariahs. (The engineer is also jobless, divorced and homeless.)

“I want the film to be seen in Germany, because it is a story about the Holocaust, and it could receive a lot of discussion and controversy there,” Morris told *In These Times*. “But I didn’t make it to prove that the Holocaust happened. I don’t need to do that. I don’t need to prove the sky is blue, either. I made it to explore the problem of Fred Leuchter. I don’t think that Fred is such a peculiar character that he’s not one of us. Everyone has a tendency to see the world with blinders on.”

It would be easy to ridicule Leuchter.

He is self-deluded and silly, and he also has done real harm. But *Mr. Death* seizes upon our eagerness to point fingers, and then invites us into the reality that Leuchter experiences before we do that. In the end, Leuchter emerges as harmful and pathetic, but also as one of us. Morris takes us beyond the freak show and asks us to consider the amazing and alarming qualities of human consciousness and their implications.

Morris is pleased that *Mr. Death*, like his other documentaries, is getting released in theaters, but he wants more: “I want a bigger audience.”

That larger audience may finally be creeping up on Morris’ work through *First Person*, a series of 10 profiles airing Wednesdays on the Bravo cable channel. The series features a crime scene cleaner and an autistic builder of humane

slaughterhouses, among others.

The first of these profiles, *Stairway to Heaven*, showcases the unique capacities and insights of Temple Grandin, the autistic inventor. Once again, Morris reverses our polarities of vitality and morbidity. But this isn’t unusual. As he says, “What makes the world tolerable to me is that I often find it unutterably insane.” ■

Pat Aufderheide’s latest book is *The Daily Planet: A Critic on the Capitalist Culture Beat* (University of Minnesota Press).

Arianna's Change of Heart

Establishment lefties are saying that Arianna Huffington has changed her tune. In her seventh book, *How to Overthrow the Government*, she endorses direct action, third parties, media boycotts and campaign finance reform. Has this former Gingrich girl turned into a progressive populist?

The *Nation* trio of Micah Sifry, Marc Cooper and David Corn thinks so. She has had a change of heart, they say, and she's putting her money where her mouth is. Indeed, she's wild for Public Campaign, the campaign finance reform group where Sifry is a senior analyst. She gave Cooper free copies of her book, which he promoted to entice contributions to his radio show on Pacifica in Los Angeles. She even invited her well-connected crowd to a Washington party promoting Corn's political thriller, *Deep Background*. "She got a physical distance from the Republican crowd," Corn told the *New York Observer's* Joe Conason.

Responding to complaints from his colleague Katha Pollitt, Corn moaned, "Some lefties, alas would rather have targets than allies, maintain enemies rather than welcome converts."

I guess I'm one of those lefties, too. Try as I might to catch Huffington's new tune, all I hear is a familiar drone.

To recap: Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington—born in Athens, transplanted to London—first made waves attacking feminism. *The Female Woman* was commissioned by the publisher of Germaine Greer's *Female Eunuch* as a conservative counter-offensive (which it was).

She stayed in the spotlight through the men in her life: Her dates have included est founder Werner Erhard, media magnate Mort Zuckerman, former California Gov. Jerry Brown and, of course, her ex-husband Michael Huffington, heir to the Huffco oil fortune. It is kind to attribute such liaisons to strategic rather than erotic choice. (She was divorced in 1997, and her ex-husband later came out in the pages of *Esquire*.)

In 1994, after Michael's failed Senate race, Arianna relaunched herself. Huffington won conservative influence in the capital and helped advance the Beltway career of Marvin Olasky, whose *Tragedy of American Compassion* inspired Newt Gingrich's Contract with America.



Huffington's 1994 book, *The Fourth Instinct* is full of what Gingrich and Olasky were full of: pushing charities, not government, as the poor's salvation. With Olasky, Huffington founded the Center for Effective Compassion, an innocuous-sounding conduit for right-wing dollars to reach strategic conservative causes like the Center for New Black Leadership (CNBL), a kind of media platform for conservative Blacks like Alan Keyes and Rep. J.C. Watts (R-Okla.)

Huffington now seems to have jumped ship. But her "transformation" is questionable. She's still a conservative activist. She's a pal of David Horowitz, whose magazine *Heterodoxy* has been a longtime outlet for her writing. Again this fall, she will address Horowitz's "The Weekend" retreat. She's still on the boards of CNBL and Hollywood Concerned—a group, founded by Watts among others, that supports "tax incentives for inner-city renewal" (that's corporate tax breaks) and vouchers to help a handful opt out of bad public schools.

Huffington's also a borrower. In *Overthrow* it's as if she trawled left-of-center Web sites and reprinted long tracts of research by the Center for Public Integrity, Public Campaign and the Sentencing Project to make her case that change is due. The "action

directory," of groups in her book lists some progressive think tanks, but the "activist" groups she endorses are conservative, engaging in spiritual renewal, mentoring and charitable giving.

Huffington's plan? Bring "government dollars" together with "individual engagement." She's pretty specific about the individual—give to good causes, volunteer—but she barely touches government. There's no talk here about workers rights, affirmative action, health care, income supports or, heaven forbid, income taxes. It's like her "answer" to corruption in media: not restrictions on corporate dominance, but "civic journalism" (i.e. listing worthy organizations in newspapers).

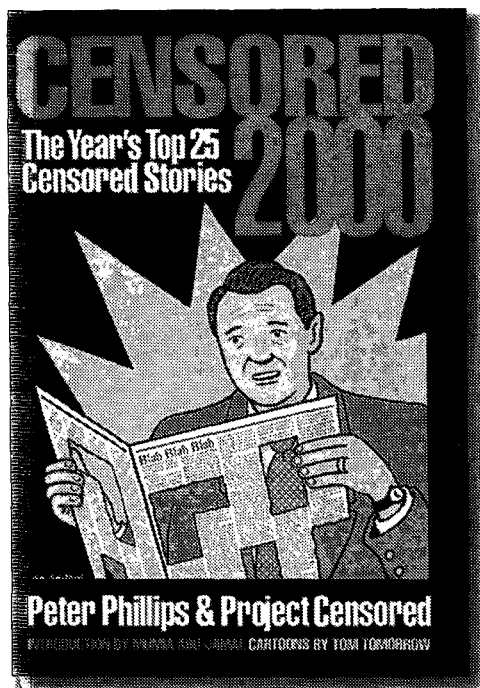
Huffington rails against "false speech," but it was she who floated the allegation that former U.S. Ambassador Larry Lawrence was buried in Arlington because President Clinton slept with his wife (who sued her). She accused the author of a critical book about the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness cult she had belonged to of being a pedophile (he sued, too). Campaign

Try as I might to catch Arianna Huffington's new tune, all I hear is a familiar drone.

manager Ed Rollins reports that during her husband's 1994 Senate race, Arianna deployed private investigators to dig up dirt on opponent Dianne Feinstein, as well as a journalist writing for *Vanity Fair*.

With her access to the media, Huffington is putting arguments for change out there. That's good. But there's a danger, too. Pro-status quo media are always looking to pad their center-right debates with acceptable alternatives to real progressives. Who is more acceptable than a conservative with lefty support like Huffington? *Salon* recently launched its campaign 2000 Web site with a banner ad that promised such a debate: Horowitz vs. Huffington.

Like that other Greek high-flier Icarus, Arianna too will fall from grace. ■



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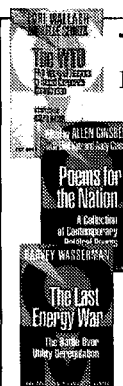
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PUTIN'S PROMISES

Will Russia's new president launch a revolution from above?

By Fred Weir

Moscow

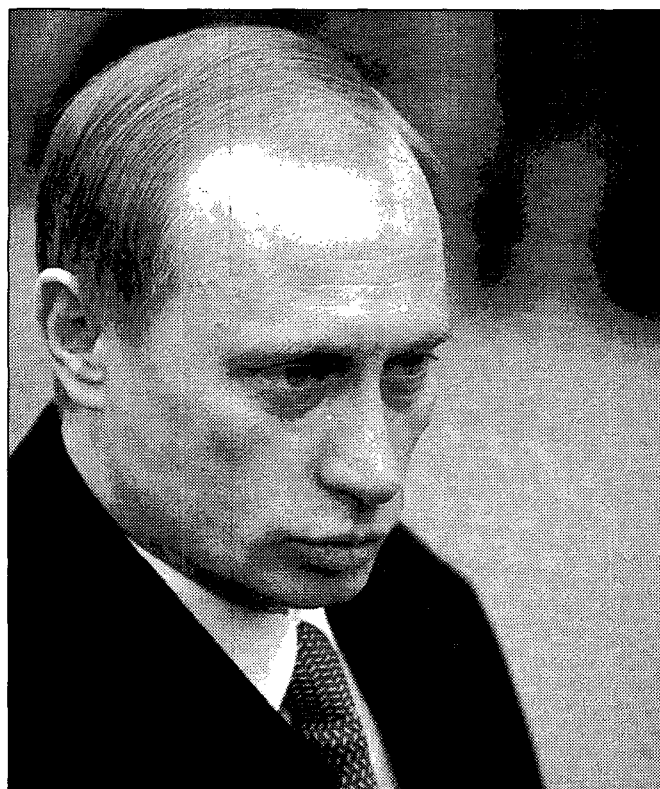
A lot of things that will lead to many controversies need to be done," said a smiling Vladimir Putin after being elected Russia's second post-Soviet president. A narrow 53 percent majority of votes ensured he would not have to face a second round against the perennial also-ran of Russian politics, Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov.

Putin has made vague but dramatic-sounding pledges to fight corruption, reverse Russia's decade-long economic depression and install a fierce "dictatorship of law" to protect the individual rights of all citizens. He now has a popular mandate to begin sweeping changes. The only thing missing is any detailed indication of what he actually plans to do. "Putin is an enigma as far as his basic beliefs and intentions go," says Sergei Markov, a political consultant in Moscow. "He won the election by sounding notes that Russians want to hear, but actually saying nothing."

Welcome to the Putin era. Even the new Russian president himself may have no idea, as yet, what his economic, social and foreign policy strategy will be. But whatever direction is chosen, the primary engine of change is almost certain to be a reinvented version of Russia's traditional curse: arrogant and authoritarian state power, backed by the security forces.

Putin, a 47-year-old former KGB field agent, has made it clear that he sees a weak Kremlin as the main reason for Russia's post-Soviet decline. The recurrent theme of his election campaign was that Russia must have "a strong state" capable of "consolidating society" and restoring the "national will." In a pre-election booklet of interviews, issued in lieu of a program, Putin mused that Russians are "genetically disposed" to want a strong leader. In various public comments he has said the USSR should not have retreated from Eastern Europe, praised the domestic role of the Soviet KGB—he described secret informers as "patriots"—labeled Chechen separatist rebels as "animals" and called journalist Andrei Babitsky, who covered the Chechnya war from the other side, a "traitor."

Some of Putin's deeds, since being appointed prime minister by Boris Yeltsin last August, make clear that it's not just talk. He exploited public hysteria over a string of as yet unsolved terrorist apartment bombings to launch a full-scale invasion of Chechnya last October. His ruthless conduct of the war earned him broad popularity among Russians who are fed up with their country's decline, disintegration and humiliation. Putin frequently has discussed the war as an illustration of how he intends to tackle other problems. "Putin paved his way to power over the bodies of thousands of Russian soldiers and Chechen civilians," says Andrei Piontkovsky, director of the



LASKI DIFFUSION/NEWSMAKERS

Opponents have charged Putin with rigging the March 26 vote.

Center for Strategic Studies. "Why does anyone think he will stop using indiscriminate force now?"

Yeltsin's surprise New Year's Eve resignation vaulted Putin into the job of acting president. That maneuver caught Russia's opposition flat-footed, and short-circuited the normal democratic process. The brief five-week election campaign was almost devoid of choice. Putin refused from the outset to elaborate a program or debate his rivals. He grandly turned down the 80 minutes of free TV advertising time each candidate was entitled to, in favor of "strictly carrying out state duties."

Instead, Russia's two state-owned national TV networks adopted an all-Putin-all-the-time news agenda. In dramatically staged events covered by fawning journalists, the acting president was shown displaying his black-belt judo skills, flying a fighter plane, enjoying a bit of skiing, partying with female celebrities on International Women's Day, speaking German to a foreign visitor in the Kremlin, clutching his family's pet poodle in a TV interview, and shedding tears as he compared his mentor Yeltsin to his deceased father. In contrast, several of his exposure-starved opponents were reduced to appearing on a popular TV game show.

The European Institute for the Media (EIM), which has covered five post-Soviet elections, calculates that Putin received

half of all time devoted to the elections on Russian news and public affairs programs, totally eclipsing the other 11 candidates. Much of the coverage given by state TV to other candidates was sharply negative. In contrast to previous elections, lackluster Communist leader Zyuganov was largely ignored. Tellingly, the pro-Kremlin media chose to go after liberal Grigory Yavlinsky, the only candidate to use his election platform to criticize the war in Chechnya and warn that Russia is drifting toward a new authoritarianism.

News programs drew specious links between Yavlinsky's outside—specifically Israeli—backing, and much was made on the state-run ORT network of a Russian gay rights group that declared its support for him. "The methods used fundamentally contradict ethical principles of the journalistic profession as well as international standards which Russia has endorsed," says the cautiously-worded EIM election report, which was funded by the European Union. "This reversion to past practices and some signs that Vladimir Putin's administration intends to approach media-related questions in a more assertive way, could indicate that freedom of expression and the autonomy of the media in Russia may encounter new tests in the future."

Both Zyuganov and Yavlinsky have charged the March 26 voting was rigged, especially in prisons, military bases and some far-flung regions where local governors, who rule like satraps, can engineer pretty much any result they want. The claim by Russia's Central Electoral Commission that Putin won 65 percent of the vote in war-torn Chechnya—82 percent in the devastated city of Grozny—is beyond belief. Official figures show that 517,000 ballots were sent to Chechnya, for use by 457,000 registered voters. Even allowing for the fact that nearly 100,000 Russian troops are presently occupying the region, the numbers seem impossible. In Chechnya's 1997 presidential election, the tiny republic had 385,000 registered voters. Since the current war began last

October, an estimated 200,000 people have fled the fighting to neighboring Ingushetia. Of Chechnya's remaining population, thousands are internally displaced, many have lost the documents needed to prove voting eligibility and still others live in areas under rebel control. However, no observers or independent journalists were permitted into Chechnya to witness the voting there, so protests are fruitless. "Everyone knows the population of Russia is declining quite rapidly," says a bitter Sergei Potapov, the Communist Party's main campaign manager. "But in the war-ravaged republic of Chechnya, we are witnessing a miracle: The population has grown dramatically and, for some reason, everyone is over 18."

Experts believe that if there was vote-fixing on March 26, it probably only ensured that Putin would avoid the indignity of facing a second round against Zyuganov three weeks later. There was simply no reason to doubt the reality of Putin's popularity, based on his carefully crafted and constantly broadcast image as a decisive, capable and incorruptible man of action. The main thing for many voters seemed to be that he was not Yeltsin. "Putin is young, active and clever," says Inna Manukyan, a 40-year-old Moscow accountant who voted for Putin. "He walks without support, speaks a foreign language and talks without notes. That's the image of Russia the world will see now. A good-looking young man, who knows how to behave and deal on equal terms with other leaders. I'm very happy about it."

There are several pressing issues that will define the Putin era:

- **Chechnya.** Though Russia has occupied most of the breakaway republic's territory, the guerrilla war is just beginning. By early May, when the snows melt and the beech forests of rugged southern Chechnya sprout foliage, the rebels will become highly mobile and the sputtering

UNION NYET

By Tony Wesolowsky

Moscow—Tanya's face draws a blank when asked about trade unions. The young receptionist at a posh Moscow hotel mulls the question for a few moments during one of the brief breaks in her hectic work day: "Unions? You know I really haven't given them much thought. But I guess they could do some good."

Such comments are common in Russia, where many people see unions as a curiosity at best, an irritant or irrelevant at worst. Nearly a decade's worth of failed economic reforms have sapped any hope Russians once had. Now, one in four goes months without pay. Millions more are unemployed (just how many is unclear because tens of thousands have been consigned to unpaid administrative leave, swelling the ranks of the "hidden unemployed"). Others work at crumbling industries. With the economy in shambles, 35 percent of Russians live below the poverty line. People interviewed on the streets of Moscow expressed hopelessness, putting little faith in the promises of unions to make things better.

A 1996 poll showed only 6 percent of Russians trusted trade unions. Consequently, union ranks in Russia are winnowing. In 1992, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FNPR) boasted of representing 60 million of 73 million

Russian workers. Since then 15 million Russians have turned in their union cards. Volodya, a 47-year-old driver here, is convinced unions mean one thing: paying dues, and not much else. All they want, he says rubbing his thumb against two fingers, is money. "Why do I need a union?" he asks.

A skeptical work force is just one of many roadblocks facing unions in Russia. Even if employees are eager to join unions, employers aren't keen to allow it. Union drives are commonly blocked, especially in the nascent commercial sector (one of the few areas to show a pulse in Russia's ailing economy), according to a 1999 report on worldwide labor rights by the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

In the central Russian city of Yekaterinburg, for instance, workers at the local Coca-Cola bottling plant were fed up with the company flouting their rights. Among other things, Coca-Cola was squeezing 12-hour days out of the workers, four more than stipulated in their work agreements. Last June, the 240 workers voted to form a union. But just two months later, the workers backed down and disavowed the union after Coca-Cola made it clear it would cost them their jobs if they didn't. Even though the local prosecutor found Coca-Cola to be violating labor law at the bottling plant, the union has yet to be reinstated. "They blocked the union organizers from going to work; the union shop steward was shut out for two months, and wasn't paid," says Tamara Lukicheva of the Sverdlovsk Regional Organization of Commerce and Catering Workers'

partisan war will flare up. For Putin, the conflict has outlived its political usefulness and it's time for an exit plan. There is a dwindling chance he will try to negotiate peace with genuine Chechen leaders, such as elected President Aslan Maskhadov. More likely is the solution Putin himself suggested in a recent interview: imposing direct presidential rule on the tiny republic. That suggests the military forces, not a political process of compromise and reconciliation, will be the main instrument for bringing the region to heel.

- **The Oligarchs.** Under Yeltsin, a tiny handful of corrupt tycoons came to own the crown jewels of Russia's economy, primarily natural resources. Their antisocial, asset-stripping style has left infrastructure starved for investment, resulted in at least \$200 billion in capital flight over the past eight years and nearly bankrupted the state. Under Putin so far, the oligarchs have been given free rein. Boris Berezovsky, for example, has snapped up several media properties and acquired a near monopoly over the lucrative aluminum industry. But candidate Putin promised to fight corruption and eliminate the dire poverty that afflicts more than a third of Russians. "The oligarchs have their supporters in government and media, and will fight for their prerogatives," says Alexander Bezz, president of the Civil Society Foundation, a private think tank. "If Putin is serious about fighting poverty, he'll have to force the oligarchs to

stop stealing and invest in Russian production. That means he'll have to declare war on them."

- **The Regions.** Regional governor became an elected office under Yeltsin, but elites in many places simply maneuvered to establish local dictatorships. Putin could fight that trend by clarifying the constitutional division of powers and encouraging the growth of municipal and district legislatures to counter the arbitrary might of the governors. The new president has said little of his plans, but has mused about abolishing elections and making governors into presidential appointees.
- **The Press.** "The media is the only institution left in Russia that has any independence or scope to resist power," says Irina Kobrinskaya, an analyst at the EastWest Institute in Moscow. "The election campaign, and its abuses, shows that press freedom is hanging by a thread in this country." Putin could use his vast powers to protect and foster free expression and criticism. Or not.

Will Putin, as his supporters maintain, use a time of strong Kremlin rule to impose genuine law-and-order, build democratic institutions and foster a West European-style regulated market economy? Or will he opt for a new revolution-from-above, and use bureaucratic force to restore tough vertical power, arrest Russia's orgy of regionalism and effect industrial modernization? The answers are imminent. ■

Union of Russia. "We don't think Coca-Cola should be making a profit from the hands of our workers when the company is not ready to respect their rights."

Rank-and-file workers have resorted to desperate tactics, sometimes with tragic results. In one of the most spectacular cases, several hundred workers converged on a pulping plant outside St. Petersburg last October. They had heard that troops were preparing to storm the building and drag out eight of their comrades holed up inside, who were demanding \$1 million in wage arrears and a review of the controversial sale of the plant to British owners in 1997. When state forces did rush the plant, two of the workers were shot and wounded.

Workers in Russia aren't the only ones being intimidated. According to the ICFTU, union activists routinely face being sacked, demoted or even killed. In January 1999, Gennady Borisov, leader of Moscow's Vnukovo Airlines Technical and Ground Personnel Union, was murdered outside his apartment. He became the second union leader at Vnukovo to be murdered in less than five years.

More than anything else, however, Russia's current labor woes are rooted in its Soviet past. Back then, unions formed a troika with the Communist Party and plant management to ensure fulfilling economic goals. Good work was rarely rewarded with raises because wages were tightly controlled. Moreover, higher wages meant little in a country not exactly known for its cornucopia of consumer goods. On the other hand, shoddy work rarely resulted in firing, which was considered anathema in the "workers' state."

So payment in kind and paternalism became the plant manager's "carrots" to prod Russians to work harder, explains

Frank Hoffer, a Russian labor specialist with the ILO office in Moscow. Under the Communist scheme, unions dispensed coveted goods and services. They determined and paid pensions, controlled benefits from social insurance funds (for sickness, disability, maternity, etc.), and established eligibility for state welfare benefits. Unions dished out passes to union-managed health facilities, vacation resorts and children's summer camps. They also had a hand in managing company-owned housing (more than half the housing stock in the Soviet Union) and childcare. Given their role, unions looked to management for cooperation, not conflict. Strikes were unheard of.

Though much of that old system has crumbled, the FNPR is still linked with that history. However, Vadim Borisov, the ICFTU representative in Moscow, says the FNPR has reformed itself in the past four years. It joined the ICFTU, which has affiliates in 145 countries representing 125 million members, and has even improved once icy relations with the AFL-CIO.

At the same time, so-called independent unions have stepped in to offer Russian workers more aggressive representation. Independents have done well in sectors that have demonstrated solidarity and militancy in the past, like the coal miners. Union drives have also been successful in sectors with well-educated workers such as pilots. But overall, drives have yielded little. Of course, it's difficult to define and defend workers' rights in an overstuffed, inefficient and collapsing system.

Back in 1989, a soap shortage sparked wildcat coal miners' strikes in Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan that contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Those strikes prove that workers can be mobilized, but Russia's new trade unions have yet to tap into that potential. If they don't, for workers like Tanya unions will remain just a curiosity. ■

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Moldova makes a strange poster child for post-Soviet reform

By G. Pascal Zachary

CHISINAU, MOLDOVA

At the expense of U.S. taxpayers, dozens of American aid workers and embassy officials were quietly flown out of this impoverished former Soviet republic in the week leading up to the new year. In what amounted to an all-expenses-paid Christmas holiday, the Americans were spirited from the country because the U.S. government couldn't guarantee their safety in case of a Y2K debacle because the Moldovan government had done little to prepare for a computer meltdown.

The specter of disaster mystified Moldovans. "The Americans are more worried about it than we are," said one Moldovan employee of an American aid outfit. "In Moldova, nothing happens automatically. We have Y2K every day."

It turned out the Moldovans were right. Nothing went awry on the first day of January. As the days passed without cataclysm, the concerns of U.S. officials turned to embarrassment as it became clear they had spent a chunk of the \$40 million in 1999 aid to Moldova on a boondoggle. The embassy hastily canceled everyone's leave, and ordered the aid workers to return.

The false alarm was a perfect metaphor for what's gone wrong with U.S. policy toward Moldova, a tiny country of 4.4 million sandwiched between Romania and Ukraine. This resource-poor country was once a major source of fruit and vegetables for the Soviet Union, but has seen its economy fall apart since independence in 1991. After a decade of lessons in U.S.-style capitalism, Moldova's GDP is just one-third of its 1989 level (compared to Russia at 55 percent and Belarus at 78 percent, according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which monitors the economies of the former Eastern bloc).

The economic decline translates into dismal human terms. Life expectancy is down. Fewer kids attend school. The once solid state health care system is collapsing. Fewer people work and many who do receive their wages months late. Then there is the cold. Power shortages are rampant. In winter, schools and hospitals are frigid. Even in Chisinau, the country's capital, apartment dwellers have not had hot water for years. Moldova is utterly dependent on Russia's giant gas supplier, Gazprom, for all of its heating and electricity. But Moldova can't afford to pay its energy bills. To "manage" the country's debt, Gazprom periodically turns off the tap. In early March, the entire country went at least a week without gas after the Russians cut it off. Even when the gas is flowing, most people lack heat.

Yet the United States still trumpets Moldova as "a poster child for reform," in the words of one senior U.S. official in the country, because of its embrace of free-market ideology,



deregulation and privatization of land and businesses once held by the state. Moldova is a strange advertisement for what optimists call the "economic transition" in the former Soviet Union. After eight years in power, the country's free-market reformers were routed in elections last fall. Former Communists tallied the largest vote and, while not winning enough seats in parliament to form a government, they succeeded in tossing out of office the economic liberals most closely associated with the United States.

The setback came as no surprise to veteran observers of Moldova, who criticize the neoliberals for failing to build a popular base for economic reforms. "They don't share anybody's pain, they don't go to the people," says one veteran aid worker. "Reformers were invented, sculpted and designed by the aid community. We made them. Were they the Lenins of reform? No, everybody said these are the yes men of the West. They got free trips to the United States, fed on the trough of American aid. But they had no feeling for the people, and often no imagination. Sadly, the reformers are sometimes the dumbest lights."

The dirty little secret is that well-intentioned U.S. donors are often embarrassed by what's gone down in the lesser-known countries of the former Soviet Union. But as in Russia, they have no alternatives to offer and resort to backing those politicians who happily feed on the aid trough. A few embarrassing examples:

- The United States spent millions of dollars to create a state-of-the-art stock exchange for Moldova, equipped with the latest electronic trading methods. But foreign investors never arrived, and locals have exploited a loophole that allows cash purchases of stock under \$10,000. So while the Moldovan exchange has no hot stocks, it has become popular with money launderers who can park their ill-gotten

gains, legally, under the nose of security regulators trained by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

- Moldova has a breakaway republic called Transnistria, which is run by a Stalin-like dictator who is protected by a few thousand Russian troops. Transnistria, a sliver of land on the east side of the Dniester River, is home to one of Russia's largest weapons stockpiles. While the Moldovan government has no control over Transnistria—negotiations are stalled over the terms of ending the rebellion—arms dealers flit back and forth across the porous border. In one flagrant example in late 1998, a cargo company linked to Gazprom was preparing to ship a plane-load of Russian-made missile-guidance systems to a Middle Eastern country. The plane was preparing for takeoff from Chisinau's main airport when CIA officials stopped the pilot and seized the shipment. No one was arrested, however, and the cargo company still operates.
- Air Moldova, which has ties to both the Moldovan government and Gazprom, has been linked to the smuggling of asylum-seekers. In late 1998, the airline diverted a scheduled flight from Chisinau to Budapest, landing the plane instead in Prague. Czech officials surrounded the plane, which contained asylum-seekers, who would automatically gain the right to refugee status once they touched ground. The Czechs blocked the main doors, but the plane's crew apparently opened emergency escape doors so that about 100 people were able to get off and claim refugee status. The Moldovan government insisted it had no knowledge of the scheme, which apparently involved the refugees paying bribes in exchange for the illicit transit. The Czech Republic retaliated by stripping the airline of its landing rights and imposing a visa requirement on every Moldovan visitor.

U.S.-backed programs aren't all failures, of course. Notable successes have been achieved in land reform, where Moldova has empowered peasant farmers more than anywhere else in the former Soviet Union. The Center for Private Business Reform, an American-led aid group, has broken up hundreds of collective farms. The group even arranged for legal land title to be given to thousands of farmers whose families' land had been seized by Stalin in the brutal land collectivization of the late '40s after Moldova was incorporated into the Soviet Union. More than half of the country still works the land, so the potential for bottom-up democracy in Moldova remains.

But despite the gains to individual farmers, the country's old Soviet elites still oppose peasant power. Bureaucratic snafus have delayed land titles to thousands of deserving farmers. And the state continues to monopolize key food products. It sets an artificially low price for wheat and bans its export, for instance, so private farmers are forced to sell at a loss. When farmers responded by growing unregulated products, and then trucking them to markets on their own, the Moldovan government proposed a law that would mandate all farmers—no matter their age or experience—obtain farming licenses. The government argued the license was needed to show that people had proper training and were not somehow putting their land at risk through faulty techniques. But the Center for Private Business Reform pressured the government to withdraw the bill last year.

The mystery, of course, is how ordinary Moldovans survive all this. "According to the official statistics, practically the whole population of Moldova has to die," says Alexander Muravschi, a former minister of the economy. One of the leading neoliberal reformers in the country, Muravschi argues that the actual economy is much healthier because of a sizable black market. He points to new investment in a cell-phone network, the first cash machines in the country and the use of credit cards for the first time.

The black economy does help some people, but only a thin layer. A few even get rich. Maybe 5 percent, or about 200,000 people, are much better off than in Soviet times. Muravschi sees this elite as a harbinger of the future. "I understand that there are difficulties you have to go through to create this new system," he says. "It is the same situation in all post-Soviet countries. You have to create the critical mass of people who can understand and live in new conditions."

This takes time, he says, because "a majority of our people lived in the old system. But I feel the new generation, especially people under 30, they have the new mentality." They also have feet. Thousands of the most talented, energetic Moldovans are moving abroad to work. While the money they send back home helps, many migrant workers will stay abroad for good. Their departures, meanwhile, hamper life here. Schools watch helplessly as teachers, tired of a \$25-a-month salary that gets paid months late anyway, leave in mid-year to work as maids in Greece.

Intellectuals and artists go, too. One recent morning, Juri Platon, Moldova's most-celebrated young painter, showed off his work in a chilly studio in Chisinau. Platon, whose works are being exhibited throughout Europe, now lives in Germany. He keeps a studio in Moldova for his infrequent visits and to satisfy his sentimentality. On the wall hangs a photograph that speaks volumes of Moldova's predicament: It shows Platon as a youth, surrounded by other aspiring artists who in the waning years of the Soviet Union formed a collective here. But of the 18 artists pictured on the wall, none lives in Moldova anymore.

The exodus of talented people makes some believe that a different model of development is taking root in Moldova: not the sort of slow and steady transition from communism to democracy that the U.S. State Department is fond of citing. Nor is Moldova becoming a mini-Russia, in the grip of criminal cliques who are battling for supremacy with ultra-nationalists who may one day reimpose state socialism. In Moldova, another future seems more plausible: deepening inequality. "This is the age-old problem, no different than El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua," says Vince Morabito, an American who heads the Center for Private Business Reform and spent a decade in Central America working in peasant cooperatives.

To Morabito, inequality fosters a kind of fatalism, an impoverishment of ideas as well as things. "The deprivation is bad, but worse there's not a dissident in the country," he says. "Where's the revolution? Where's a real leader willing to go on the line? People are passively sitting there. You can't take anything more away from them. It has all been taken." ■

G. Pascal Zachary is author of The Global Me (Public Affairs), a forthcoming book about how developed countries benefit from ethnic and racial diversity.

Steering the Global Economy

By David Dyssegaard Kallick

Progressives are struggling to come to grips with today's global economy. Yet we're missing two key things: a map of where we're going and the power to steer this country in the right direction.

We know the direction we don't want to go. Seattle crystallized opposition to the ravages of globalization. But progressives haven't been able to agree on an alternative. More and more activists seem to recognize that what we must counter isn't globalization itself, but the neoliberal conception of globalization. We should be fighting not to stop trade across borders, but to ensure that democracy, workers rights and the environment are improved by a global economy—not eroded by it.

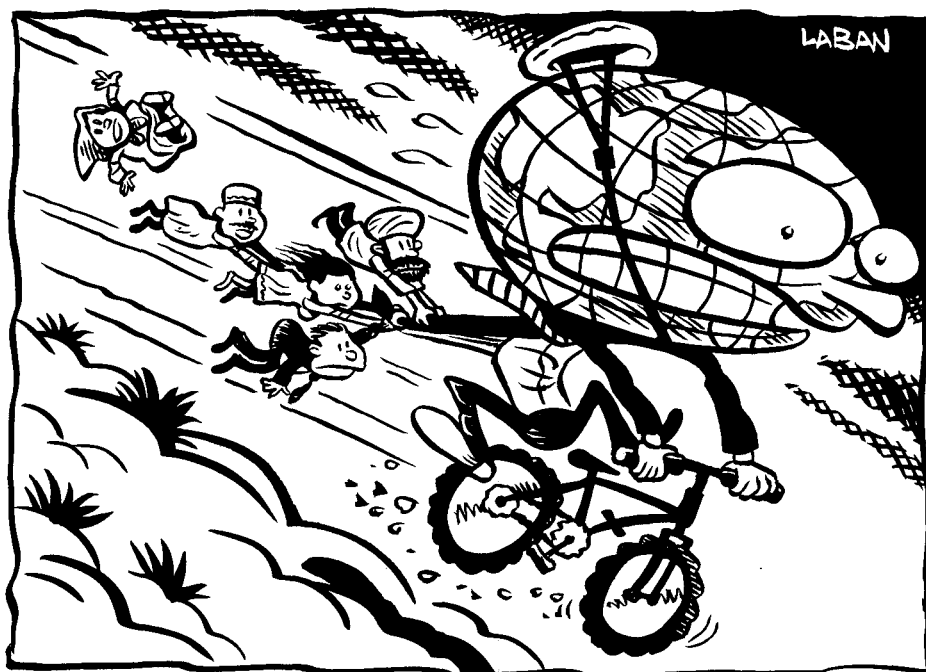
Progressives are far from the levers of power that matter most. Over the past 25 years, transnational corporations—with the blessings of successive administrations—have used quick transfers of capital and production as a way to avoid government and unions, the traditional counterbalances to corporate power.

Do progressives have an agenda that both incorporates a long-term economic vision and pulls the right levers to control capitalism in an era of globalization? Yes and no. We are still grappling with day-to-day struggles and working in relative isolation. But the pieces are starting to fit together—in theory if not yet in practice.

The following is a survey of progressive efforts to shape the global economy. A dynamic combination of approaches—used vigorously, flexibly and to mutually reinforcing effect—will have the greatest impact. The key will be expanding these efforts and finding the right mix.

The Rules

The neoliberal conception of globalization is enforced by a nexus of international institutions and agreements: the WTO, IMF, World Bank, U.S. Treasury, Federal Reserve, Deutsche Bank, NAFTA, MAI, etc. Robert Stumberg, a professor at Georgetown Law School and attorney for the Free Burma Coalition, warns that addressing these institutions and agreements must be part of any progressive strategy, since many of the most common tactics could be challenged under their provisions. Even boycotts or voluntary codes of conduct, for example, could be held to be in violation of the WTO's "technical barriers to trade."



Progressives can deal with the international institutions in three ways: playing by the rules, working to change the rules, or simply ignoring the rules.

Playing by the rules means scrambling to define the accepted common practice of an industry. "Industry will try to win the race to set its own standards—and then they'll claim that's the accepted international standard," Stumberg says. "Then they'll say the ecological or social standard is a local standard and is therefore not acceptable." Playing by the rules can yield results: President Clinton recently signed an International Labor Organization (ILO) agreement prohibiting indentured service for children, child prostitution and use of children in hazardous work. (Well, it's a start.)

Working to change the rules involves trying to influence the major institutional players. "The original conception of the international financial institutions is that they appropriately serve as a controlling influence over market forces," says Tom Schlesinger, director of the Financial Markets Center. "There's a lot of baby that shouldn't be thrown out with the bath water." In other words, we don't want to replace poorly regulated markets with unregulated ones.

Part of working to change the rules is contesting which institution's rules and regulations should take priority. If a WTO rule conflicts with an ILO rule, which should apply? Rather than accept WTO or NAFTA stipulations, activists can try to pick a better forum and make a case for its primacy. For example, Stumberg argues that it would be a violation of the First Amendment for the United States to prohibit

non-governmental organizations or state governments from giving products "union-made" or "organically certified" labels. This kind of argument pits the Constitution against the WTO—a battle the Constitution could win.

Ignoring the WTO may seem an ostrich-like strategy. But for the U.S. government, it may not be so absurd. "Frankly, anything the United States wants to do it can do," Stumberg says. "Under the recent Helms/Burton controversy, we simply refused to go to the hearing."

National governments still matter, and the U.S. government matters most. "The nation state is not completely eroded," says Clarence Lusane, author of *Race in the Global Era*. "It's still a fundamental entity in international politics. And capital is still state based, even though it functions globally."

While progressives should recognize the changing economic landscape, we'd be foolish to overstate the degree of change. Our biggest problem with the power of the national government is not how much it is eroding, but how far we are from it.

Local Motion

What can be done locally to combat globalization? Regulation is hard to do below the national level. But a variety of economic players—a city council, a business, a foundation, a church—are able to stipulate who they want to do business with under what conditions. The most visible example of this kind of stipulation is the flurry of living wage laws passed in recent years. The laws say, in effect, anyone carrying out government contracts must pay workers well above the minimum wage.

Of course, when contractual links demand too much, corporations will walk away. Municipal governments know this. But, they also are becoming increasingly smart about how to demand enough so that the contract is worthwhile for the companies and also pays off for the community. It takes a keen understanding of the economic realities to be able to call a corporation's bluff.

In Mississippi, where the training and community development organization Southern Echo operates, leaders are testing the bounds of what communities can demand. Co-director Leroy Johnson explains that under global capitalism, Mississippi has become "just a short stopping ground" for companies "as they moved further south to Mexico and Guatemala."

Yet the trick is not just to attract more corporations or to stop them from coming, Johnson argues, but to extract a fair deal for workers and communities while they're in town. "We're not living under a cloud of stupidity," he says. "We don't expect these companies to stay for a long time. We expect them to stay here five or 10 years. But during that time, we expect them to pay a living wage."

Contractual agreements aren't as strong as regulations: They can't set industry-wide standards. But they are more supple, and they can give incentives for businesses to achieve higher than minimum levels of compliance. Fred Azcarate, executive direc-

tor of Jobs with Justice, is enthusiastic about the potential of living wage campaigns to mobilize constituencies. "But our own self-criticism would be: At the end of the day, how many workers are covered? So far, at least, the numbers are not very high."

While transnational corporations can slip the ties to national government, they have a harder time slipping their ties to the public. Consider the apparel industry: Clothes production is easy work to move. And it's difficult for U.S. regulators to do much about labor standards internationally—even if they were inclined to try. But consumers can win battles if they choose their targets wisely. People of Faith Network and the National Labor Committee, for instance, pressed The Gap to adopt a code of conduct. Such tactics have since become a common way to rein in abuse of subcontracted labor. United Students Against Sweatshops picked up the battle over Third World working conditions and has taken it to nearly 150 campuses in the United States and Canada.

Likewise, publicly held corporations can't afford to ignore pressure from their shareholders. Organizing investors was instrumental in isolating South Africa during the days of apartheid, and it's a significant factor in today's anti-sweatshop campaigns. The Boston-based United for a Fair Economy has introduced 14 resolutions at shareholder meetings this year—including at Citigroup, GE, AT&T and Disney. Resolutions include reporting requirements for "corporate welfare," campaign contributions and lobbying expenses; proposals to broaden stock ownership among employees; and formulas to set a ratio between the pay of average employees and CEOs. You don't have to win the vote to change policy, stresses director Chuck Collins. "If resolutions get 8 or 9 percent of the vote," he says, "that starts to rock the boat a little bit."

Public pressure is a strategy that's well suited to today's

economy: It cuts through national borders and networks of loose accountability. When strongly asserted, it also establishes a sense of public accountability for corporate behavior. Public pressure is a tactic that could be made stronger if governments established better monitoring and rules for access to corporate information. Yet even at its best, public pressure has its limits. For starters, corporations that don't rely on public image or sell consumer products are basically immune to outside pressure.

Developing Alternatives

We are against sweatshops, polarization of income and underinvestment in workers and equipment. But what are we for? "You've got to close off the low road, but you also have to help pave the high road," says Joel Rogers, co-author of *What Workers Want*. Activists must build a viable alternative vision of how to sustain high-wage, good-quality jobs.

Rogers has been instrumental in setting up the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, a consortium of companies and unions trying to develop skills among workers and

increase capital investments among companies so that the region's manufacturers can break into the "virtuous circle" of high-wage jobs with high-productivity workers.

The difficulty within the American system, Rogers suggests, is that it's in no single company's best interest to invest in workers. Once they can command higher wages, workers can look for a job with another firm at better pay. Regional training partnerships are designed to generalize the benefit—all employers within a region contribute, and all workers and employers benefit.

Some critics charge that Rogers paints a rosy, "win/win" world. He replies that while there has to be profit for the private sector, companies also can be forced to accept fair terms for workers. "You need to make capital an offer," Rogers says, "but it also has to be an offer it can't refuse."

This progressive vision has attractive elements, but it's not enough for Errol Louis, co-founder of the Central Brooklyn Federal Credit Union and a longtime veteran of battles for community economic development in New York. "Real families need real jobs and real consumer choices," he says. "The seductive part about globalization is that these companies can fit the bill. They can deliver."

Until Louis sees a concrete and large-scale plan, he's focusing on how to get the most out of what's happening on the ground. "Where I see globalization in my face is a place like 125th Street," he says. "It's very different than when I lived there as a boy. Until a few months ago, there were failing shops, mom-and-pop stores, lack of consumer choice. There was just enough to keep people at subsistence level or just above. And there was a lot of money flowing out."

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Now even if you were trying to ignore globalization, you can't miss it: "The Disney mouse is there, The Gap is there, Body Shop is there, it's all happening at the Magic Johnson Theater," he says. "There's not much in it for small-scale entrepreneurs. But big boxes are always helpful for entry-level and low-wage jobs. It's not ideal, but let's face it, low-wage jobs is part of what we need."

David Imbroscio, author of *Reconstructing City Politics*, is not as skeptical as Louis of the existing progressive economic alternatives. Community development corporations and banks, credit unions, worker ownership, municipal ownership, community land trusts, co-ops—these are all moves in the right direction, he says. The problem is, each of these has been tried on such a small scale that it exists in a vacuum. What's needed is not only to expand and replicate the individual efforts, but to create a rich and dynamic climate in which the different types of initiatives reinforce each other.

Once these types of initiatives expand, Imbroscio argues, they'll begin to change the structure of the local economy. Then as these initiatives begin to comprise a substantial portion of the local economy, they also begin to build a local power base—and command the attention of local politicians who otherwise spend their time scrambling to give tax breaks to large corporations. "The question is: Are we dedicating enough resources to these institutions?" he asks. "If you can put all these together and bring them up to scale, I really think that they have a lot of potential."

Imbroscio is aware of some of the problems of each model—all can be diverted from their primary purpose, or controlled by corporate interests, or function undemocratically. But, he maintains, they are also our best hope for building the foundation of an economy constructed in opposition to neoliberal free-market principles. This is an alternative economic structure that is viable in a globalized world.

We Are the World

What about the rest of the world? The most damaging—and wrongheaded—argument against introducing labor and environmental sanctions to the WTO is that they will hurt developing countries. Activists in the United States need to be clear that the goal is not to protect jobs here, but to improve standards everywhere. As Jeremy Brecher, co-author of *Global Village or Global Pillage*, puts it: "If your program is that we're going to get more of those jobs here, I don't think that's adequate. I think it has to be that we're going to improve jobs here, and we're going to complain like hell about the IMF and U.S. Treasury approach that's dismantling the education system in Mexico."

For unions, the idea of cross-border solidarity is old—that's why so many of them are called "international brotherhoods." Indeed, there was a time when unions, not nation-states, were envisioned as the primary counterbalance to corporate power. But beginning in the '50s, when industry started moving work overseas, unions halted at the U.S. border. Corporations began to press their advantage, and used low-wage workers in other countries to whipsaw U.S. workers and unions, putting a constant downward pressure on wages.

Unions like UNITE have realized that they must ignore borders and follow the work. According to Alan Howard,

assistant to the president of UNITE, the union's cross-border strategy is beginning to show some limited results. In the Dominican Republic, there has been a steady trickle of plants organized after a breakthrough campaign in 1994. And UNITE now is working in coordination with local unions to move up from the plant level to negotiate a contract covering all workers in an industrial park in the Bonao free-trade zone. "There are 200,000 workers [in the free-trade zones] in the Dominican Republic," Howard says. "When we went there [in 1994], there was not a single collective bargaining agreement." Roughly 5,000 workers are now covered; the ongoing negotiation would add another few thousand.

International solidarity is also a key component of the movement to cancel enormous amounts of foreign debt in poor, developing countries. "For years, we'd been working on other ways to aid developing countries, from tuberculosis control to micro-credit lending programs," says Joanne Carter of Results, a Washington-based international anti-poverty organization. "But it just gets clearer and clearer that if we don't address the underlying structural issues—debt burden, the way it puts them in a position that they are controlled by foreign institutions—you can make incremental progress on other issues, and that can be wiped away."

The problem is the crippling conditions that the enforcers of global capitalism—the IMF, the World Bank, central banks and private lenders—impose on lending or development assistance. Following a rigid neoliberal program, global capital always prescribes the same basic strategy: develop an economy that favors exports over domestic production, scrap social programs, privatize industry, and don't even think about cooperative or other models of economic development. In short, it's a recipe for disaster.

Debt relief clearly would give developing countries some much-needed breathing space, but it's just a step along the way. "Too many groups have tended to say the problem is debt, when that's not really the problem," Carter says. "The problem is neoliberalism—the economic philosophy that's being pushed on these countries—and the control by unaccountable institutions."

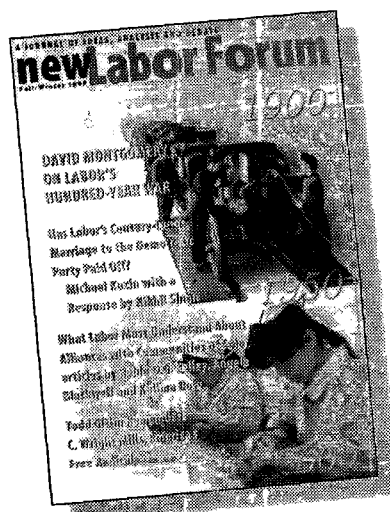
to bring a concern for global equity and sustainability to local economic development strategies. And they need to bring a concern for local and transnational perspectives to national politics."

The WTO protests in Seattle showed our capacity to mobilize a constituency large, broad and angry enough to put a critique of globalization on the national agenda. Now we need to expand the base of an already fractious movement; walk the line between outrage with the system and a belief it can change; and forge a forceful and coherent alternative vision. ■

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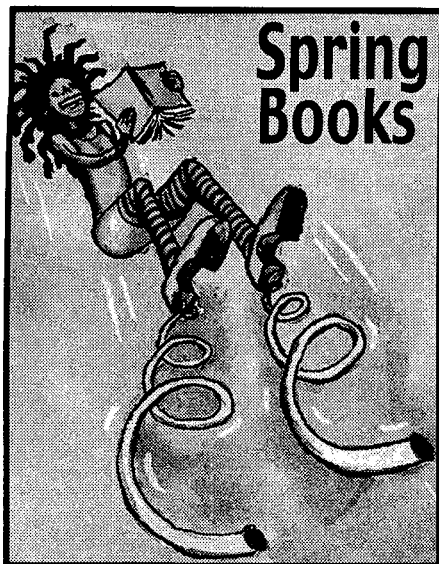
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"There's an important role for seasoned radicals in the coming months," says Allen Hunter of New York University. "They need



Mother Night

By Laura Secor

comfort she must have felt as she listened to the survivors' tales and attempted to transpose them into a readable form.

None of this book's characters are named, nor are the Bosnian towns from which they hail. Instead Drakulic gives us S. and E. from the village of B. Why did she make such a choice? The publisher's press release indicates that the protagonist is meant to be a Balkan "everywoman." Drakulic may have supposed that a nameless, faceless protagonist would invite closer identification, but many readers will find that this device has the opposite effect: It is alienating, opaque and uncomfortably consonant with the soldiers' view of the women as interchangeable. But this consonance is not uninteresting, since it no doubt reflects a psychological reality: Uprooted, brutalized and numb, S. has become estranged from herself, as though she has internalized the anonymity forced on her by her captors.

Half Serb and half Muslim, S. is a young school teacher who grew up in Sarajevo and lives in a Muslim village at the outbreak of war. One morning, soldiers round up the townspeople in the school gymnasium, separating men from women and busing the women to a warehouse in the Bosnian woods. There the inmates

she is abducted to another part of the camp, where she is gang raped and beaten unconscious. S. and the other inmates in the "women's room" have been selected to "entertain" Serbian soldiers and camp guards, many of whom terrorize their victims with cigarette burns, death threats and beatings. A 13-year-old inmate dies of knife wounds at the hands of a paramilitary who had once been a friend of her brother. S., to her great relief, is summoned by the camp commander to serve as his mistress. She is no longer available to the other soldiers, and once a week she has a hot meal. Still, she knows that her fellow inmates envy and resent her; S. is "the only real prostitute among them, and that is how she feels, too ... she cannot conceal from herself the fact that she is sleeping with a murderer."

One night, the women's room is pervaded by dense and putrid smoke. N., the women's kindly warden who has kept them supplied with food and soap, tells her charges to go back to sleep—the smell is only garbage burning. But the women soon discover that in the courtyard, the soldiers are burning bodies. For as horrible as camp life is for the women, the men in the adjoining camp are sentenced to certain death. The women, livid with anger and disgust, turn their fury on N. But S. recognizes in their hatred the potential for cruelty, and in an attempt to resist its pull, she says, "N. is not to blame." Now the other women are furious with S. One of them asks, "Am I to blame?"

Much later, when S. has fled to Sweden, five months pregnant and a stranger to herself, this exchange recurs. A childhood acquaintance shelters her and helps her navigate the Swedish government bureaucracy. S. tells her friend that she does not want to keep the child she is carrying, and the friend expresses disapproval. "The child is not to blame," she admonishes. S. says nothing, but she is privately indignant: "Is maybe she to blame? And what is she to blame for?" she asks herself. In these parallel moments Drakulic closes the circle of violence: Its victims have

When the Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulic interviewed female victims of the Bosnian war, she thought she was compiling a work of nonfiction. But it is not hard to imagine the journalist's dismay as she collected survivors' tales of unimaginable suffering, and their experiences remained, exactly, unimaginable. The

S.: A Novel about the Balkans
By Slavenka Drakulic
Viking
201 pages, \$22.95

witnesses no doubt spoke in the evacuated monotone of trauma, devoid of poetry and of pathos. Drakulic's desire to forge an empathic connection with these women, we can imagine her realizing, was itself a luxury: Most of the survivors wanted nothing more than to disengage from what they had been through.

Rather than present, unmediated, the testimony she heard, Drakulic pressed the women's stories into a single narrative of one woman's passage through the nightmare of war. In prose that evokes the flat, dissociated voice of a trauma victim, *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* tells the story of a Bosnian woman who has just given birth to a child of rape. The book is not exactly a novel; nor is it reportage; nor is it memoir. It is an awkward hybrid of truth and fiction, of evocative detail and flatfooted homily. The book's power, in the end, derives from this tension—an uneasiness that expresses the horror Drakulic documents and also, perhaps unwittingly, the dis-

A schoolteacher is rounded up one morning and "reduced ... to brute existence."

sleep on a concrete floor; they eat little, they work in the fields, and they are forced to defecate in plain view. "In a single day," S. remembers later, "we had all been reduced to the lowest possible denominator, to brute existence."

It is not long before S.'s fate worsens. Along with eight other young women,

no power over their tormentors, so their anger finds other targets—idle witnesses, fellow sufferers, unborn children of rape. And if such accomplices cannot be named, S. and her fellow prisoners fear that they themselves will become the only outlet for their own rage.

Fully a third of S. occurs after the protagonist is released from the camp in Bosnia, and some of Drakulic's most evocative material is contained in this segment. Sent first to Zagreb, S. considers moving in with a distant relative, but there is something too poignant about her cousin's modest apartment, her fear that her son will be drafted, and the helpless platitudes she offers S. regarding the cold-blooded murder of S.'s parents and sister. Ordinary life becomes impenetrable to S. as she wanders the streets of Zagreb: ice cream, nail polish and, eventually, flight attendants on her way to Sweden all symbolize the world that has somehow continued to turn even throughout S.'s confinement. In Sweden, she is wholly dependent on her host and only later realizes, with shame, that she has expected "those who had the least to do with the war" to correct the injustice she has suffered.

S. is full of such observations. Some of them are profound, and they possess the stealthy power of Drakulic's best essays, which harbor astute insights beneath a veneer of deceptive simplicity. Others, unfortunately, are more than a little familiar, and told with the repetitiveness and heavy-handedness of Drakulic's lesser work. Over and over again, we are told what we already hear on the novel's opening page—that S. is relieved to give birth and that "her entire past has spilled out of her with this child." At several points, Drakulic has her numb, traumatized heroine bluntly state the

novel's central political messages: "Only now does S. understand that a woman's body never really belongs to the woman. It belongs to others—to the man, the children, the family. And in wartime to soldiers." At such moments, we are all too aware that S. is less a character than a vehicle for Drakulic's meditations on the humiliation of women in war.

For this reason, reading this book on its literary merits can be frustrating. Although virtually all of the characters, including S., have lost family members in this war, the texture of their grief is indiscernible. S. is a deliberately neu-

protagonist's psyche—and if she does, won't she find there the dissociation that follows trauma?

This book occupies a liminal space between essay and fiction, between intimacy and estrangement, and it is sometimes hard to understand why Drakulic did not opt to give us the first-hand testimony she collected from refugees. But each of her choices, however effective or ineffective, taps a rich vein of psychological complexity. How does one write about another person's pain? How does one read about it? What details do we demand in order to see the picture fully—and why do we demand them?

Of course, Drakulic, author of *Marble Skin* and *The Taste of a Man* along with three books of essays, is not an artless writer, and to read S. as a novel is perhaps to miss the point. For the reader who knows little about the suffering of Muslim women in wartime Bosnia, this book provides a vivid depiction of their displacement, brutalization and survival.

Through it one can at least attempt to comprehend what it must mean to lose everything—one's family, one's home, one's country, one's

place in the world. Drakulic does not take it upon herself to untangle the larger political forces behind the war; instead, she drives home its senselessness by showing us characters for whom the terms of the war are not ethnic but human. The story of the break-up of Yugoslavia is notoriously complex, but the story of human suffering in wartime is in some sense singular, universal and timeless. These may be the best reasons, in the end, for Drakulic to preserve S.'s anonymity; of course, they would be equally good reasons for her to have done the opposite. ■

Laura Secor is a senior editor of *Lingua Franca*.



VLADIMIR VETKIN/AFP

tral character who has few, if any, distinctive traits or personal recollections. One senses that there is not really a novelist's imagination at work here so much as the constrained voice of a journalist trying to tell it like it is and stick to what she knows.

Since Drakulic chose to fictionalize this story, one wishes, at points, that she had gone the whole distance. But no doubt the testimony Drakulic first collected was similarly disconnected, even affectless in places where memory was too painful to delve. One feels the writer trapped in this paradox. Should she tell a story of more vivid emotional detail than the stories that were told to her? Can she dare to imagine herself into her



Coming to America

By Ted Kleine

As a rule, first-generation immigrants don't give us literature. Aliens to the language, they leave the storytelling to their children, who produce books about living in threadbare apartments and working in mom and dad's Quik-Mart after school.

The Question of Bruno

By Aleksandar Hemon

Nan A. Talese/Doubleday

231 pages, \$22.95

That's why this book of short stories by Aleksandar Hemon, a Bosnian refugee who arrived in America less than eight years ago, is such a marvelous thing. If you've ever stared across the counter of a Mexican *taqueria* or a Vietnamese laundry and wondered what new immigrants think of this country, here is your answer.

Hemon's idol is Vladimir Nabokov, another Slavic writer who adopted English as a literary language. Nabokov had an English nanny to instruct him, but Hemon had to start from scratch: He learned, in part, by reading *Lolita* and underlining all the strange words. As a stylist, Hemon can't match Nabokov's chamber music, but his deadpan prose is spangled with images that might never have occurred to a jaded native: the Chicago skyline looks like "the bottom of the Tetris screen," TV reporters' microphones are "delectable lollipops."

There's another, more important difference between the two authors: Nabokov's émigrés, like the author himself, were effete, aristocratic Continentals who came to this country with a self-confident command of the language and a sense of superiority to America's boobish culture. Hemon and his characters have neither. Like almost every immigrant who ever walked down the plank at Ellis Island or passed through customs in O'Hare, they arrive as strangers, silent strivers who will begin their lives in America by doing society's invisible jobs: busing tables, driving cabs, pressing shirts. It's a story almost never told from the inside.

Back home in Sarajevo, Hemon was a respected author. "The Life and Work of Alphonse Kauders," which appears in this book, was originally written in Serbo-Croatian and anthologized in *Best Yugoslav Short Stories 1990*. It's not the first story in this collection, and it's the least autobiographical, but it's a good place to start reading, because it shows us how Hemon wrote before he was torn from his home and his native language; there is no real life in this string of sentence-long anecdotes about a forester who shows up at all the crucial events in European history. There is little solace in war and exile, but they've made Hemon a richer writer. *The Question of Bruno* is such a fascinating book because its eight stories trace his flight from the Old World life of prewar Yugoslavia to an immigrant neighborhood in America. It's like a multiple-exposure photograph of a long-jumper: Every point in his trajectory is a frozen moment.

If fish could talk, they wouldn't discuss water, and if Hemon were still a Sarajevo intellectual, he probably wouldn't be writing so nostalgically about his youth in Tito's Yugoslavia. There's a story in here, "The Sorge Spy Ring," told by a boy whose father is imprisoned for working as a Russian agent. It doesn't sound like a precious memory, yet Hemon actually finds some funny moments as he describes how Yugoslavs dealt with the paranoia of living in a totalitarian society. One of the hero's friends tells him that "one shouldn't use Tito's name in vain, for Comrade Tito had TV monitors at his palace, at which he could see every single resident of Yugoslavia." The boy figures the camera is inside the television, so he goes to his parents' bedroom for privacy. It's the same way a child in a Christian society might react after hearing the Bible verse about God seeing every falling sparrow. In Yugoslavia, Tito was the deity.

Hemon's memories of Sarajevo also show that immigrants to this country are not all ethnically pure metal waiting to be melted into the American alloy.

Yugoslavia was, after all, an example of cultural mixing gone murderously bad. Hemon's biography describes him as "half-Serbian, half-Ukrainian," but there are even more exotic fruits on his family tree. The story "Exchange of Pleasant Words" is a family chronicle

**Hemon's
immigrants arrive
as silent strivers
who will begin
their new lives by
doing society's
invisible jobs.**

that shows Sarajevo was only one stop for the wandering Hemons; Yugoslavia was no more their home than America. The Adam of the family was Alexandre, a Napoleonic soldier who invaded Russia, got lost in the woods, married a Ukrainian girl, and produced offspring who moved on to Bosnia. An even more ancient Hemon, according to an Orthodox priest in the story, was a man who mocked Jesus on the cross. "His seed was winnowed and scattered all over this doomed earth, eternally miserable, alone and deprived of God's love."

The author wonders if his family is still being punished in the 20th century:

We have to live these half-lives of people who cannot forget what they used to be and who are afraid of being addressed in a foreign language, not being able to utter anything truly meaningful. I have seen my parents mute, in an elevator, in Schaumburg, Illinois, staring at their uncomfortable toes, stowed in foreign shoes, as a breezy English-speaking neighbor entered and attempted to commence a conversation about the unkind Midwestern weather.

It could be that Hemon has been so successful in this country because

emigration is in his blood; to be a Hemon is to be a foreigner, no matter where you are. The polyglot family was comfortable in the old Yugoslavia, but once that experiment in multiculturalism collapsed, they became part of the more successful experiment going on here.

One gets the idea that Hemon wouldn't have been comfortable with the rigid tribal identities demanded by today's Bosnia. In fact, his one war story, "A Coin," is told from the point of view of a Muslim woman who somehow does not curse the Serbs. She simply tries to survive: She dodges snipers, buries a dead aunt, works as a guide for foreign TV correspondents and compiles their most gruesome footage in a tape she calls *Cinema Inferno*.

The very best piece in this book is the novella "Blind Jozef Pronek & Dead Souls." This is where the long-jumper lands. A Bosnian writer arrives in America for a literary tour, and quickly shows himself to be the wisest of naïfs as he is led from stop to stop. When his guide takes him to the White House, Pronek asks, "Why is it called White House? Do you have to be white to live there?" (At his Quality Inn, he dries his underwear by "pressing the hair dryer's muzzle in its face, as if torturing it to

confess"—a metaphor unlikely to occur to an American writer.)

Jozef Pronek shows up here in 1992 on Super Bowl weekend, which gives him a chance to observe three great American traits: self-absorption, gregariousness and obesity. The slob seated next to him on the airplane wants to talk about the game—"the fucking biggie"—but loses interest in Pronek when he finds out he's not a Redskins fan:

"Ah, you're a foreigner!" he triumphantly exclaimed and exhaled again.

"What do you think of America? Isn't it the greatest country on earth?"

"I'm afraid I don't know yet. I just arrived."

"It's great. People are great. Freedom, all that. Best in the world."

The man then settles in with a copy of *Seven Spiritual Laws of Growth*, a Deepak Chopra takeoff that reappears several times in the story. Hemon obviously has a keen eye for civic religions: In Yugoslavia, it was Tito; in America, it's money.

But we're not all portrayed as *Main Street* boosters with salesman-like personalities. Pronek makes his way to Chicago (which is Hemon's new hometown), where he shacks up with Andrea, a painter he met when they were both vacationing in Ukraine a few years ear-

lier. She lives in a rented room with "brassieres hanging, like rabbit skins, from doorknobs; a bag full of shoes and stacks of books on the floor, like a little downtown." In the evenings, Pronek watches the news from Sarajevo with her pot-smoking, Nintendo-playing housemates, Carwin and Chad, who wonder why the Bosnians and the Serbs can't "chill out."

Pronek decides to stay with the country, but not the girl, and finds himself a job in the kitchen of a chain cafe called Boudin French Sourdough Bakery. He lives the interior dilemma of the immigrant, the "half-life" he talks about in "Exchange of Pleasant Words." Inside, he's a sophisticated author, so distinguished that during his tour, he was introduced to John Milius, screenwriter of *Apocalypse Now*. Outside, he's a dummy who can barely speak English. At the bakery, some yuppie hassles Pronek because he gets iceberg lettuce on his Turkey dijon sandwich. He wanted *romaine*:

"Romaine lettuce, iceberg lettuce, what's difference?" Pronek said, with a sudden vision of stuffing the lettuce leaf into the man's mouth.

"May I talk to someone who can speak English, please?" the man said.

Pronek gets canned, a victim of monolingual America's attitude that those alien to our tongue are unsophisticated and unintelligent. But Pronek, straddling two cultures at once, begs the question: Just who is provincial? Hemon has mastered America better than most; because of that, he gives us lessons about our country and language that no native, and few immigrants, could ever teach us. ■

Ted Kleine frequently writes for *In These Times* and the *Chicago Reader*.



"Subway Passengers, New York, 1938" from *Walker Evans* by Maria Morris Hambourg, Jeff L. Rosenheim, Douglas Eklund and Mia Fineman, published by Princeton University Press with New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, where an Evans retrospective is now showing through May 14. The exhibition will be at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art from June 2 to September 12, and at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts from December 17 to March 11, 2001.



Take a Hike

By Jane Holtz Kay

Birds don't do it. Bees don't do it. Even educated fleas don't do it. And, as was said of Gerald Ford, he couldn't chew gum and do it.

The "it," amplified in Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, is placing one foot in front of the other. It is that act, as this ambitious and often absorbing book emphasizes, that allows us bipeds to define ourselves as *homo sapiens*.

Not withstanding my sixth-grade teacher's insistence on the thumb as the measure of the man, this look at the most everyday of motions makes a good case that bipedalism is destiny. Today's harassed walkers, striding through an era when the motor vehicle threatens that destiny, will emerge alternately enlightened and overwhelmed by Solnit's in-depth analysis of the political, social and aesthetic meaning and value of mobility.

Although the author brings her own past expeditions to the task, the wanderlust in the title is rather more ethereal than personal. The opening chapter, "The Mind at Three Miles an Hour," ranges through a history of pedestrian-minded philosophers, if you will, from Rousseau ("I can only meditate when I am walking") to the Peripatetics, who were named for the colonnade or walk (*peripatos*).

Wanderlust: A History of Walking
By Rebecca Solnit
Viking
326 pages, \$24.95

The book alternates between profound and less-than-profound comments: "There is something about walking which stimulates and enlivens my thoughts," she quotes one philosopher. Nonetheless, many anecdotes on walking's place in the world hold more interest. Kierkegaard is here, crediting his own father's regular walks "back and forth in a room with him, describing the world so visibly that the boy seemed to see all the variety evoked" with his own creativity. More eerily, we see an incar-

cerated Albert Speer, Nazi Germany's favorite architect, spending his last days walking an imaginary world as he circles his prison cell.

Solnit also tackles the anthropological and evolutionary theories of walking by heading back in time—way back, long before the human race evolved—to

**Proximity
spawns radical
neighborliness;
ideas ferment in
the company of
other minds.**

trace how and why our capacity to walk distinguishes us from the ape. "Whatever its causes, it caused much more: it opened up new horizons of possibility," she writes. Among these are the spare pair of limbs it freed for fetching or carrying while standing upright, and the strong buttocks and solid construction for long walks. Thus built, this two-legged walker may have struggled (observe the crawling, creeping, toddling and—only many painful tries later—walking infant). But once given the ability to walk, this fabulous "column of flesh and bone" gained the ability for much else.

Walking may be extraordinary, but walkers themselves have not achieved great recognition through the ages. "A traveler on foot in this country seems to be considered as a sort of wildman, or an out-of-the-way being who is stared at, pitied, suspected and shunned by everybody that he meets," an 18th-century foot traveler observed about America. How very contemporary: Movement by the speediest means of conveyance, then as now, would appear to confer status on the traveler. On the brink of the 21st century, rapid movement still takes precedence: To be car-free is to be equally estranged and diminished in today's auto-centric society.

Not every walk is a speed walk, of course. Winging back and forth in time,

Solnit sketches the purposeful and deliberate pace of the pilgrimage. Its categories trace an arc from the spiritual and missionary walks of the devout, to the route of the monument-tracers memorializing their friends and heirs, to the familiar yellow-brick road of fundraisers who lope through today's city streets in sweats doing walkathons for the worthy.

These massed movements of pilgrims and pedestrians bring a new dimension to Solnit's focus, but the extension of these movements into religion, and then art, produces still more fascinating passages. Solnit shows how the mobility of humankind is enshrined and structured in the religious walks that follow, for example, the Stations of the Cross. The walker's path has shaped the great aesthetic and moralistic works of landscape art as well: Labyrinths, for example, carry the message that sometimes you must turn your back and traverse twists and contours to reach the essence.

This view from the ground up enlightens the approach to architecture and urban design as a whole. The power of, say, the Villa d'Este outside Rome stems from its design as a steep stair or passageway. 20th-century architects also reinforce the route of the walker, as architects Charles Moore and William Turnbull draw an inviting, defining "thread" for their gardens, or the Walk of the Stars on Hollywood Boulevard beckons to tromping name-seekers.

Unfortunately, Solnit seems less comfortable with urban turf than mountainous, historical or literary explorations. Descriptions of the urban environment and walker become negative and patronizing: "Urban walking has always been a shadier business, easily turning into soliciting, cruising, promenading, shopping, rioting, protesting, skulking, loitering and other activities that, however enjoyable, hardly have the high moral tone of nature appreciation."

The city reader bristles as the book veers rather too high-mindedly, slighting the wondrous diversity of city life and community created by the urban walker's presence on teeming streets. In fact, for all of Solnit's encyclopedic quoting, the sources for urban writing here are largely conventional, the comments on American cities a bit weird

("Of course, the city resembles primordial life more than the country in a less charming way") and at other times wrong ("like London, New York has seldom prompted unalloyed praise").

Paris provokes more lyrical passages and deeper descriptions as the lair of the quintessential urban walker. Perhaps it is because the City of Light is better at "botanizing on the asphalt," as she writes, and has had better urban philosophers, like the inimitable Walter Benjamin, waxing on it. Here, then, Solnit does extend a more social purpose to urban walking: "Only citizens familiar with their city as both symbolic and practical territory, able to come together on foot and accustomed to walking about their city, can revolt." From the Paris Commune to the Boston Tea Party, radical neighborliness is spawned by proximity; ideas ferment in the company of other minds.

Solnit is a skillful narrator. Her language is good; her book filled with rich data, skillful arguments and fascinating detail. The pages of my book ripple with tipped-down corners, and are penned with lines around specifics and quotes: "Just as reading writing allows one to

read the words of someone who is absent," she says, "so roads make it possible to trace the route of the absent."

Yet *Wanderlust* too often seems to serve as a mere grab-bag of intriguing but disorganized material. The information is prodigious but extremely dense. The amplification of the concept of walking is extensive but often redundant to the point of tautology. History and literature are overweighted with metaphor; a long jaunt of Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* becomes a facile symbol of "walking beyond the boundaries of propriety for women of her class." Inevitably, after 300 pages laden with as-ye-walk, so-shall-ye-be-judged citations, *Wanderlust* can become a less-than-enthralling exercise in conventional litcrit. Certainly, hanging such ideas on a single scaffolding yields insights, but judicious editing, pruning and generalizing might have

allowed this book to reach the classic or definitive status it clearly seeks.

One can admire this book's prodigal collection of information, then, and its author's frequent grace in writing, but long for a better map to the long and fascinating trail across the landscape of our lives. ■

Jane Holtz Kay is architecture and planning critic for *The Nation* and the author of *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back* and the recently enlarged and updated *Lost Boston*.



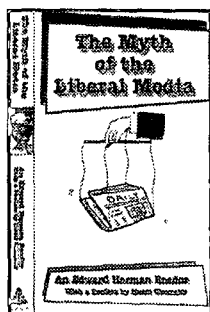
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The Myth of the Liberal Media

An Edward Herman Reader



The *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* are just a few of many commercial media giants that, Edward Herman argues, protect and propagandize for the corporate system. Media topics such as Third World elections, the Persian Gulf War, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the fall of Suharto are analyzed in this controversial new book.

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Corporate Ideals

By Kim Phillips-Fein

Graduating from Harvard Law School in the year 2000 is nothing to complain about; it assures an ambitious youngster of a fat salary and a secure social status. But even the best-paid mergers-and-acquisitions dealmaker must sometimes dream of the halcyon days of the Great Depression, when, quicker than a young man could get his J.D., he'd be called to the capital to head an important new

The Paradox of American Democracy: Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of the Public Trust

By John B. Judis
Pantheon Books
320 pages, \$26

agency or work out an exciting bit of regulation. As one contemporary told it: "A plague of young lawyers settled on Washington. They all claimed to be friends of somebody or other and mostly of Felix Frankfurter and Jerome Frank. They floated airily into offices, took desks, asked for papers and found no end of things to be busy about. I never found out why they came, what they did or why they left."

For liberal journalists, lawyers and scholars shut out in the wilderness during the dark days of Ronald Reagan, and the barely brighter ones of Bill Clinton, stories like this one only twist the knife in the wound. Running the country is their calling in life. But economics Ph.D.s from MIT and the University of Chicago get all the good jobs, the regulatory agencies are in retreat, and would-be public servants are consigned to lifetimes peering in at power from the outside or training the next generation of corporate lawyers.

Perhaps not surprisingly, disappointed liberals often have blamed the New Left for the demise of the New Deal order. One standard narrative of liberalism's decline lays the responsibility squarely on the radical Weatherfolk, the anti-war movement and black

power extremists, who frightened off the solid blue-collar core of the country. Liberals, unable to control the centrifugal forces of fringe politics, began to seem morally permissive and impotent, incapable of anything but spending other people's hard-earned money.

It's to the great credit of veteran political journalist and liberal commentator John B. Judis that he rejects this story out of hand in his new book, *The Paradox of American Democracy*. Instead of attacking the left for the decline of liberalism, Judis convincingly argues that a resurgence of "class struggle" in the '70s was primarily responsible for the destruction of the Great Society. The assault on unions and government in the '70s and '80s, far from being a revolt of the moral majority, was carefully planned and executed by what a historian starting from a different set of first premises might call an energized ruling class. Corporate leaders "turned against union organizers, environmentalists and consumer activists with the same resolve that an older generation of business leaders had turned against the AFL, the IWW and the Socialist Party." In so doing, "they turned American politics decisively away from democratic reform."

But while Judis' historical analysis of the decline of postwar liberalism is compelling, his overall political philosophy, derived from thinkers like Herbert Croly, the guiding spirit of Progressivism, has all the strengths and weaknesses of that movement, which, as Richard Hofstadter once said, "despised the rich, but feared the mob."

Judis—whose skillful reportage once graced these pages, but now appears more often between the covers of *The New Republic* and *GQ*—opens *The Paradox of American Democracy* with a lament for democracy's current disarray. He thinks there has been a "massive withdrawal from public activity and vital public questions," evidenced by low voter turnout and the absence of popular political movements. Balmy

economic climes aside, Judis warns, "our political system is faltering, and faltering in ways which might eventually undermine our progress as a nation." Hardly a fire bell in the night, but he's anxious nonetheless: If the good times stop rolling, the United States might be "completely ill-equipped to handle even the smallest crisis, let alone a severe economic downturn or war."

But despite his initial emphasis on mass politics, Judis' real gripe isn't with the citizenry. Instead, he blames popular disaffection on the "apostasy of the elites." During the Progressive era, the New Deal and even the '60s, American politics was dominated by elite organizations that sought to subordinate selfish commercial interests to "disinterested public service and a politics which transcends class." But today, "bankers, business leaders, and corporate lawyers, who, in past generations, might have been driven to devote part of their time to public service and the greater good confine their public activity to lobbying on behalf of their own firm or industry." What irks Judis isn't political quiescence as such; it's the "disturbing decline in the quality of the American political class—the former public officials, investment bankers, CEOs and academics who are periodically summoned to lend their wisdom and experience to the government and the country."

If Judis could travel back in time, he'd be a speechwriter for Theodore Roosevelt or one of Brooks Adams' many buddies. He greatly admires the pragmatic philosophies of democracy of the Progressive era, the concern for economic regulation, the trust-busting and settlement houses and top-down reforms. What he likes best about Progressivism is that it explicitly sought to quell class conflict, ameliorate poverty, end bloody strikes and create a homogenous, unified nation. (Besides early child labor laws, this impulse led to anti-immigrant legislation and some might even say Jim Crow, but that's another story.)

Approvingly, he quotes Woodrow Wilson: "What I have tried to do is get rid of any class division in the country, not only, but of any class consciousness and feeling. The worst thing that could happen to America would be that she should be divided into groups and camps in which there were men and women

who thought that they were at odds with each other." He especially admires the public-spirited businessmen of the National Civic Federation, who pushed for workers' comp and gave the AFL's Samuel Gompers a seat at the table. Of course, he loves the fresh-faced Harvard kids who flocked around Felix Frankfurter during the New Deal, and he thinks the Ford Foundation was ever so clever to fund social programs in the '60s, stealing the thunder from radicals.

But then things changed in the '70s, an era Judis describes as one of "the new class struggle." Businessmen, their profits squeezed by the double whammy of strong unions and international competition, began to believe, as Whittaker Chambers had said, that liberalism was really a nascent form of socialism. To strike back against it seemed imperative. Businessmen abandoned responsible liberal associations for the open class war of the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation. Corporate lobbyists grew like mushrooms after rain, spreading cynical doctrines like supply-side economics. Reagan was elected thanks to the aggressive efforts of business—not a groundswell of popular conservatism—and his program of tax-slashing and union-busting perfectly suited his main constituency.

To Judis this "revolt of the elite" is the ultimate betrayal. The growth of the "conservative counterestablishment,"

devoted only to advancing business interests with no concern for the common good, "undermined the very concept of elites. It was like a monarch debasing the coin of the realm by adding nickel to the silver." Jack Kemp, Arthur Laffer and Irving Kristol "were not committed to reconciling democracy with corporate

To reinvigorate democracy, Judis calls on the rich and powerful to reform themselves.

capitalism, but merely to defending corporate capitalism." Today, Judis argues, the conservative phalanx is in disarray, but it is still strong enough to prevent the development of a new public-spirited elite. Wistfully, he notes that loopy George Soros is the closest thing we have.

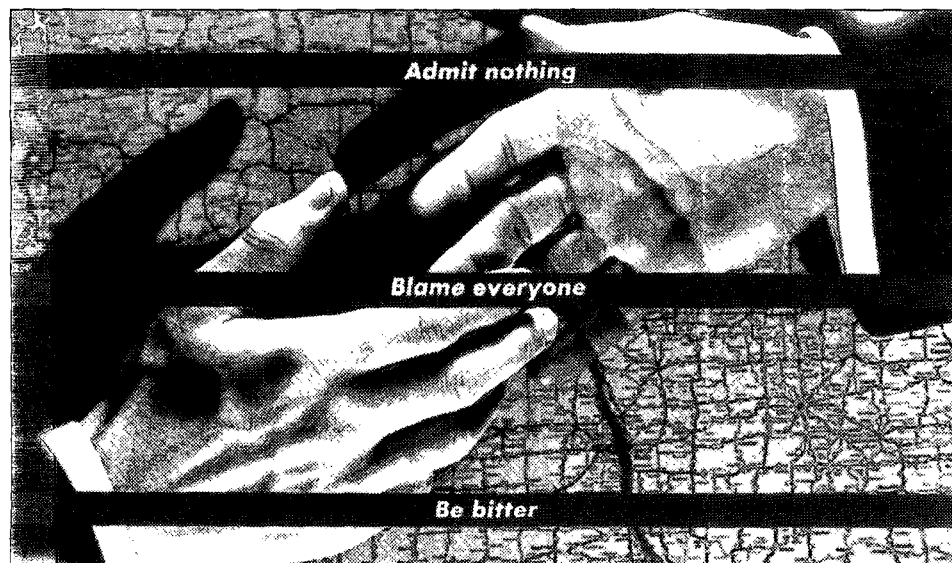
The *Paradox of American Democracy* is one of a number of recent books—by such disparate political thinkers as Thomas Geoghegan and Michael Lind—to look back to the Progressive era for political inspiration. Going back further in American history, Judis, like the Progressives, proudly associates him-

self with the Federalists, denouncing Jefferson and Jacksonian economics. In the time-honored debate between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton—decentralized government and pastoral communities versus a strong state and embrace of modernity—he is firmly in Hamilton's camp.

Many of Judis' best arguments are borrowed straight from the Progressives. Surely he's right that a strong central government is needed to govern national corporations, and that rhetorical support for the autonomy of local government often ends up being a cover for expanding the power of business. His muckracker's curiosity about powerful people making decisions behind closed doors is an antidote to cultural-studies types who glimpse rebellion in a hairstyle or dance step.

But the greatest flaws of Judis' book come straight from the Progressives, too, and the most striking is his treatment of social reform as an elite undertaking. Elites "allow citizens—who don't have the time or inclination to read every clause of an arms control treaty or every provision of a bill—to put their trust in a dispassionate group of experts. ... Trust in their wisdom and expertise has been essential to trust in government itself."

Note what's not mentioned: holding elites responsible to the people whose "common good" they are supposed to be pursuing. Here, too, Judis is carrying the Progressive torch. The Progressives never



From *Barbara Kruger*, published by The MIT Press for a retrospective of Kruger's work held at Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art earlier this year. The exhibition will be at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art from July 13 to October 22.



had the slightest interest in creating popular organizations—unions or political parties—which would be accountable to ordinary people. Instead, they believed elites should propose reforms and clean up government, while the lower orders stood respectfully aside. Judis doesn't approach this level of arrogance. He likes unions, and thinks "popular movements" can be a "counterweight" to business. But his basic program is the same: To reinvigorate democracy, he calls upon the rich and powerful to reform themselves.

This is especially strange given his examples of "disinterested" elites, namely the National Civic Federation and the Ford Foundation. Both seem ironic choices, since they pursued liberal policies explicitly to defuse popular radicalism. Judis even praises them for this strategy: "They sought to tame or co-opt movements by helping the moderate, or less radical, elements achieve their objectives." But far from being disinterested, the corporate leaders in the NCF—and to some extent Ford, during the '60s—were seeking to find ways to legitimate their power at a time when, difficult as it is to imagine today, the rule of business was hardly accepted.

The Progressive era, after all, was not only the age of TR and Wilson, but of the Ludlow massacre, the Lawrence strike and the L.A. Times bombing. Indeed, as popular radicalism died down in the late teens, the NCF moved far to the right. During World War I, it was a virulently anti-German organization, and an enthusiastic participant in the Red Scare—though you wouldn't learn anything about this from Judis' book. It's odd that Judis doesn't draw the obvious conclusion: In the absence of a challenge from below, there's no reason to expect much from the elite.

At the end of his book, Judis implies that business leaders weren't even acting in their own best interests during their attack on liberalism in the '60s. "The reforms of the Progressive Era and the New Deal and the rise of the labor movement didn't destroy capitalism, they preserved, humanized and democratized it." There is, of course, a great deal of truth to this. But it doesn't change the

reality that unions and government shift power away from business and the rich and toward workers and ordinary people. Where real interests are at stake, politics is often a zero-sum game.

There are so many real obstacles to democracy in the United States today—ranging from the under-representation of urban states in the Senate and the role of soft money in political campaigns to the incredibly weak labor laws that make it almost impossible to organize unions—that it seems a little perverse to

bemoan the perfidy of the elite. *The Paradox of American Democracy* is a well-written, compelling and original book, but ultimately there's something ahistorical and rather self-serving about Judis' suggestion that social reform can only come from bankers, academics, businessmen, journalists—in short, people exactly like himself. ■

Kim Phillips-Fein, a contributing editor for *The Baffler*, frequently writes for *In These Times*.

Up, Up and Away

By Rick Perlstein

At page 157 of Frances Fitzgerald's new book, the narrative pulls up to December 1982. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger has just reached an impasse in his shimmering dream of increasing military spending 160 percent in six years come hell, high water or budget-deficit projections in the hundreds of billions; popular support for increased defense spending has gone from 80 percent to 20 percent in two years. Congress is withholding funds from

Reagan begins thinking about the missile-defense initiative after a report from a panel of private citizens on the possibilities of using satellite weapons in outer space. A big corner marked "December 1982" appears four more times by page 202. Never, to push the metaphor, does the author reach an intersection, either. This isn't avant-garde literature, or some bold historiographic experiment; rather, it seems Fitzgerald herself might not be exactly sure where her tale is heading.

Readers who know Fitzgerald from her previous three acclaimed books will be disappointed by *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War*. They remember her relentless originality: In 1972, Fitzgerald won a Pulitzer for *Fire in the Lake*, the first history of the Vietnam War that actually took Vietnam's culture and history seriously. And her archly ironic wit: *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (1979) begins with a publisher recalling with great exasperation the time when the civil rights revolution swept the nation in a blink of the eye, and "all we had was George Washington Carver in the plates. There's only so much you can do with peanuts." And her marvelous intellectual imagination: *Cities on a Hill: A Journey through Contemporary American Cultures* (1986) propounded that America was flush with utopian communities, just as it had been in the 1830s—only now these were retirement

**Way Out There in the Blue:
Reagan, Star Wars and the End of
the Cold War**
By Frances Fitzgerald
Simon & Schuster
592 pages, \$30

the MX missile until the Pentagon figures out how to keep it from becoming a sitting duck in a theoretical Soviet first strike. (Flying the 70-ton behemoths around 24 hours a day on the backs of 747s has been one suggestion, as has been anchoring them to the ocean floor in modules that would bob up obligingly to the surface when needed.) The economy is in recession. "Under the circumstances," Fitzgerald writes, "Reagan and some of his aides began to think about a missile-defense initiative."

This is the language of a story turning a corner. There's one problem. Fitzgerald already turned this corner before—on page 146, when, in December 1982,

communities like Sun City, and neighborhoods like San Francisco's Castro District. But with this latest effort, these gifts have largely abandoned her.

There's a lot you can say about America by attending to the intersection of nuclear strategy, public opinion about nuclear weapons, and the unfathomable mind of Ronald Wilson Reagan. It's just that Fitzgerald says too much (in a 54-page chapter called "What Happened at Reykjavik?" she doesn't even bring her protagonists to Iceland until the 32nd page); and, overwhelming us, ends up saying too little—even as whole chunks of the story go missing. Where, for example, in a book purporting to explain how \$60 billion in tax dollars managed to get wasted over 17 years, are the military contractors?

Fitzgerald begins with Reagan's character, and here she isn't bad. In her analysis of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, she points out how we tend to misremember the classic picture: The pure-hearted everyman, somehow acceding to a Senate seat only to be framed for corruption by greedy land-speculators, exonerates himself in a marathon filibuster that elicits bags full of telegrams of support for his idealism and patriotism. Rent the video: That's not how it happened. In fact his adversary was so demonic that he is able to manipulate public opinion back home so that the telegrams call for Mr. Smith's ouster, not his redemption. That only comes off when the villain, through some inexplicable change of heart, confesses, unbidden, to his crime. The film somehow unites two radically opposed visions of humanity: that people have it within themselves to make their world a perfect place, and that people are irremediably fallen, to be redeemed only by apocalypse. "What made Ronald Reagan exceptional as a politician," she concludes, is that he embodied this same pleasing contradiction.

Thus the Star Wars speech of March 1983. Just like Mr. Smith, few remem-

ber the whole thing; in the part before he calls for a magic space shield that will render nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete," he cries out for a greater military buildup against what he had identified only two weeks before as the "evil empire." The Strategic Defense Initiative was Reagan's most characteristic idea, "for, since it was perfectly ambiguous, it had appeal for both Mr. Smiths: for the pre-millennialist who saw enemies advancing from all quarters and for the post-millennialist who believed that the human spirit could rise to a godlike state of disinterestedness."

If only the rest of the book was so riveting. What comes next is mostly about arms control negotiations. There is no subject more numbingly complex, and Fitzgerald has the bad judgment to give us day-by-day—and, sometimes, excruciating hour-by-hour—accounts.

The overall arc of the story, hardly visible to all but the most patient reader, is rather interesting. Through the '70s, the informal assumption that has guided nuclear strategy since the arms race began—in short, "mutually assured destruction"—becomes institutionalized in the SALT treaty, which endeavors to set caps on every imaginable variable in the two sides' nuclear programs, less one or the other achieve some "strategic superiority." Part of that process is an Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which limits defensive installations to one site per country. For in the cracked logic of nuclear strategy, defense has

always been judged a very offensive thing indeed. If the destruction of one side is not assured, who's to say they won't be tempted to use their nuclear weapons after all?

Then lurches onstage, in the waning years of the Carter administration, a fiendish band of conservatives (the "High Frontier" panel, a board of self-styled defense experts consisting mostly of businessmen and Cold War ghouls of older vintage like Paul Nitze and the execrable Edward Teller) and CIA operatives ("Team B," an intelligence claque convened for the specific purpose of somehow discrediting the first CIA team's studied conclusion that the Soviets represent no threat at all) determined to scare the country into believing the Soviets are making preparations to "win" a nuclear war. They convince enough people that the Senate would be naïve to ratify the SALT II accord. (It is scuttled.)

Other monsters (who, after 1981, reside in the White House) arrive at the idea that the answer to our prayers is abandoning the whole sturdy notion of deterrence altogether—and hustling our way out of the ABM treaty's plain meaning. They unscrupulously sell what only could be—if it could work at all—a defense of our own missiles (thus useful mostly for "winning" a nuclear war) as a defense of our population. And the idea utterly tickles a certain fantasy-prone chief executive, who refuses to believe anything but the lie that missile



From *They Drew Fire: Combat Artists of World War II* by Brian Lanker and Nicole Newnham, published by TV Books. A companion PBS documentary airs on May 15.



defense could "protect us from nuclear missiles just as a roof protects a family from the rain."

The end of this arc is the most fascinating part of all. The general public adores the idea of missile defense (scrupulous experts who say it can't be done are dismissed as the kind of naysayers who said we could never get to the moon). The ghouls have touched a nerve. "It was, it turned out, rather difficult to argue that a defense that was 70 or 80 percent effective was worse than no defense at all," Fitzgerald writes, adding, in one of her best passages, that participating in this "Sisyphean task" was "a sure sign of membership in the establishment ... a ritual, one perhaps almost as comforting as the words so often used to describe the goal of the effort: 'a stable, predictable' relationship with the Soviet Union and 'prudent defense policy.'"

This is what drove Congress to appropriate all those billions for SDI even as ordinary Americans scorned such programs as the B-1 bomber and the MX missile as wasteful extravagances. (It was also why George Bush, the potentate of prudence, refused, in his first year in office, to accept the

idea of anything so unstable and unpredictable as Gorbachev's unilateral disarmament of the USSR.)

Tens of billions of dollars and no usable military hardware later, comes a certain poll-loving president. In 1996, his opponent, Bob Dole, searching for an issue that could differentiate him from Bill Clinton without delivering him into the hands of Gingrich, hits upon the leaky tire of missile defense, which now consists of a few limping research programs. This being Dole in 1996, the voters yawn. But then, that's only because Americans assume we already *do* have missile defense—"You couldn't pay me enough to believe you," Fitzgerald quotes an auto engineer informed differently by a pollster. "After all, you see it in the movies."

All the while Republicans press for deployment of some makeshift space-based defense system—clearly banned by even the most fudging reading of the ABM treaty. They come up with the brilliant idea that we needn't worry about the ABM treaty after all, because what we were really worried about was not our co-signatory but "rogue states" like Iran and North Korea. Lo and behold it is January 1999, and Clinton's impeachment case is taken to the Senate. Thus bloodied, he does something the Democrats had been fighting against for 15 years: Just as he shred the social

safety net, he shreds the deterrence safety net (and, by alienating just about every other nuclear power with our unilateral arrogance, the arms-control safety net) by going along with the Republicans.

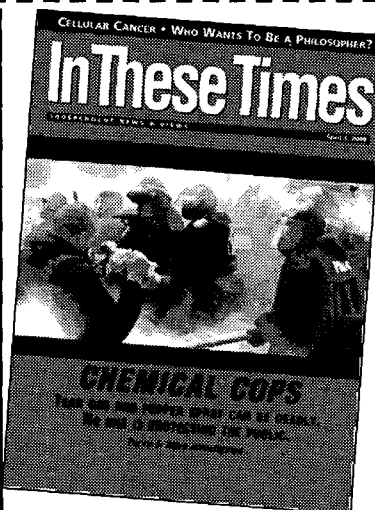
The missile defense bill sails through the Senate in March 1999 by a vote of 97 to 3; the deployment review is set for this June. Suddenly, the ideas of those wacked-out neocons and spooks are the common sense of the entire political establishment and the law of the land. Rogue states, you see. Poll numbers, you see.

Now there is no putting the genie back in the bottle. It's hegemonica. ("Hegemonica: n. The continuation in perpetuity of programs once the province of the far right, rendered law by the cowing of a president who will do anything for popularity.") "History has shown that big military programs are rarely canceled once Congress and the contractors are on board," one analyst tells Fitzgerald. Another says, "When you put this kind of cash on the table, it becomes a force of nature."

It is really too bad we don't have a good book to explain how we got from there to here. ■

Rick Perlstein is the author of *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Undoing of the American Consensus*, forthcoming next year from Hill & Wang.

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Curtain Call

By Scott McLemee

The theatrical expression “the fourth wall” was coined at the start of the 19th century. It refers to a conventional way of staging a play, in which the actors pretend not to notice that a crowd has gathered to watch them. Events onstage unfold as if the characters are in a room where a wall has been removed, or rather, made transparent—but only from the spectator’s side.

In America

By Susan Sontag
Farrar Straus and Giroux
387 pages, \$26

Most theater-goers take all this for granted. But well into the 18th century, prominent individuals attending a play might take a seat onstage, right next to Oedipus or Hamlet or whoever. (The audience watched both, presumably making the spectacle that much more enjoyable). By contrast, the fourth-wall principle was imbued with the spirit of the 19th-century bourgeoisie. It established a division of labor, of sorts, between looking and being seen. Fantasy and reality each had its proper place. And as plays grew more realistic (the settings and conflicts more domestic), playgoers could enjoy all the pleasures of voyeurism, with none of the risks.

Susan Sontag began to write during the '60s—a great era for tearing down the fourth wall. Avant-garde directors were planting actors in seats next to patrons. Action spilled offstage, into the aisles and the streets. Scripts called for improvisation, honesty, nakedness, yelling. Occasionally a performance consisted of someone onstage insulting the audience until it went home. Artists were smashing the furniture of bourgeois culture—theatrical and otherwise. And of this general reshuffling, Sontag was an advocate (in her essays) and a practitioner (in her fiction and screenplays).

One of her first efforts was an essay on a new form of non-narrative theater event called “Happenings”—what would later be called “performance art.” In 1964, Sontag published “Notes on ‘Camp.’” The essay made her famous, and turned the gay-

ghetto sensibility she described into a household word. As the term caught on with a larger public, “camp” meant celebrating Godzilla movies and pulp fiction for the pleasure of their sheer tackiness. But high camp was a queerly subversive way of “putting on” life. It was an *ars vivendi* of parody—a way of making an extravagant spectacle of yourself.

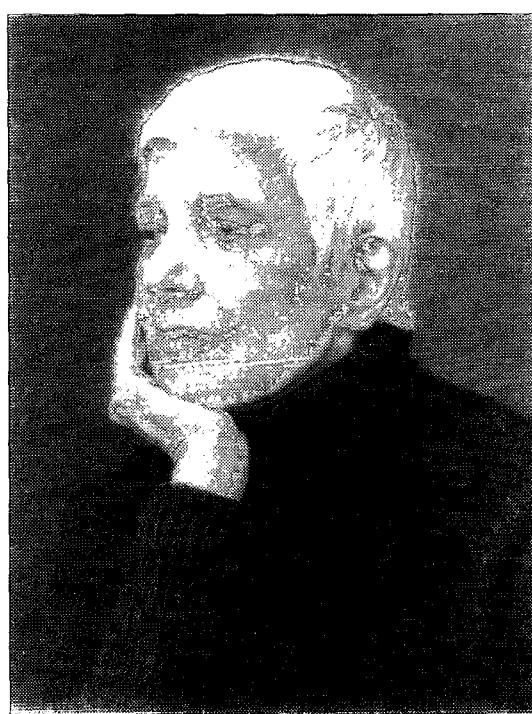
The essays she published during the '60s are very much of their era. But there was always something anachronistic about them. Sontag was a radical, but she played against type. She endorsed avant-gardism, the counterculture, and the New Left—in cadences echoing Matthew Arnold and Lionel Trilling. The prose was cool and smart, in all senses. The effect was spellbinding.

Her fiction was another story. And not much of one. Is there any tedium in the world greater than that of listening to the detailed recitation of someone’s else’s dreams? Why, yes there is: reading *The Benefactor* (1963). Her first novel was narrated by an elderly French bohemian telling of his effort to act out in reality the strange script provided by his dreams. His erasure of the line between art and life also blurs the one between sanity and madness. An essay on Simone Weil that Sontag wrote at the time was also a gloss on her own novel: “There are certain eras which are too complex, too deafened by contradictory historical and intellectual experiences, to hear the voice of sanity. Sanity becomes compromise, evasion, a lie.”

In her second novel, *Death Kit* (1967), Sontag rendered an allegorical account of the disintegration of identity and descent into oblivion during a man’s coma. Formal experiments there included dropping the parenthetical word “now” into sentences at random, and indenting every few paragraphs, also at

random—to no discernable purpose (now) beyond irritating the reader. Two screenplays Sontag wrote and directed in the late '60s were parodies of Ingmar Bergman, though not, alas, intentionally.

Sontag’s professed allegiance to high modernism in the arts has never waned. But by the mid-'70s, she had concluded that experimentation was a good thing when limited to small artistic elites, but “unacceptable” when taken up by the masses. Since then, her work has moved steadily to negate the ideas and attitudes presented in her early essays. Yet Sontag repudiates any suggestion that her cultural perspective has altered. It’s the world



From *Women*, by Annie Leibovitz and Susan Sontag (Random House).

that’s changed, not her way of thinking.

The role Sontag has played over the years—the dream of the “free floating” intellectual and writer—is very much a performance. And sometimes half the work of a performer is getting psyched for the part. Thinking is difficult enough; serious rethinking (going beyond conceptions that have become comfortable but no longer look true) can be a right miserable process. A reluctance to go public with the process is understandable, if evasive. Since the early '80s, Sontag has occasionally announced that she is saying farewell to



essay writing altogether. Her real gift, she thinks, was never for criticism; history will remember Susan Sontag as a novelist.

That is just not going to happen. Even so, the effort to reinvent herself has become more interesting to watch, following her transformation into a best-selling author with *The Volcano Lover: A Romance* (1992). Sontag has grown dismissive of those who apply the word “intellectual” to her, insisting that she is just a writer—an artist and a moral witness. Her advocacy of U.S. military action in the Balkans made only the slightest gesture in the direction of argument. The writings and statements on Bosnia were not efforts to persuade fellow citizens, but denunciations of their bottomless callousness. And at a public talk sponsored by the Smithsonian this March, Sontag indicated that her work embodies the moral power of fiction to deepen our moral responsiveness to others.

That means we should apply some pretty stringent standards to *In America*, her fourth novel. But what a reader notices, first off, is that Sontag has found a formula that seems to work. In *The Volcano Lover*, she retold the story of the notorious affair of Emma Hamilton and Admiral Nelson—set amidst the suppression of the Jacobin insurrection in Naples at the end of the 18th century. The new novel is (to quote Sontag’s headnote) “inspired by the emigration to America in 1876 of Helena Modrejewska, Poland’s most celebrated actress.” She is accompanied by her family and admirers, including the very smitten writer Henryk Sienkiewicz (later a Nobel laureate). Adulterous romance among sophisticated émigrés in an historical setting: parallels with *The Volcano Lover* are not exact, except in essentials.

The book opens with a chapter titled “Zero.” It is a well-turned stretch of metafiction, in which the narrator—who mentions details of her life corresponding to Sontag’s—wanders into a party being held by the characters who will take center stage in the novel; listening in on their conversation, she tries to figure out the relationships

among them. This is probably an homage to Laura Riding’s *Progress of Stories* (1935), a long-neglected work of experimental fiction that Sontag has cited, from time to time, as an influence. In it, Riding compares the writer of fiction to a hostess at a party. She introduces reader and character; the process of storytelling itself demands a balance of intimacy and decorum, which in turn involves a fair amount of guesswork. Sontag’s narrator crashes the party her characters have thrown for the Polish actress, rather than hosting it. Otherwise, the analogy holds.

Beyond this self-conscious (but engaging) overture, *In America* is very traditional: the novelistic equivalent of fourth-wall theater. The actress at its center is a diva, surrounded by admirers. (A less generous word, which Sontag never uses, would be sycophants.) She and her entourage are romantic patriots at a time when Polish nationalism is the great lost cause of Europe. But her urge to leave the country seems less a response to imperial Russian tyranny than some depth-dark yearning for self-transformation. She cajoles her admirers into emigrating—not to Paris (where any sensible Pole from the intelligentsia would want to live) but to the United States. In *America*, they travel to the end of the continent: Anaheim, California.

They establish a commune there, and throw themselves into learning agriculture. Amidst the great economic disorder of the period, this experience is not so idyllic. To raise funds, the actress decides to go back on stage. Becoming Americanized means changing her name to something easier on the non-Polish tongue. While on tour, she finally returns, after many a year, to the passion of a novelist whose love for her had until then been unrequited. The romance is short-lived. Despite an accent—or rather (like Garbo) because of it—she triumphs. She becomes the greatest actress in the land, adored even more than in the old country. She endorses products. She becomes an American.

In America requires its characters to travel a great deal—which is undoubtedly fortunate, since it gives them something to do. (In Sontag’s

earlier fiction, that was often a problem.) Likewise, the demands of historical fiction provide some needed ballast to her imagination. One convention of the genre is the moment when something familiar and commonplace in the reader’s world registers in the awareness of a character, back in the era when it was still new. (“Huzzah, Sir—there’s the Earle of Sandwich! Why holds he, in such manner, morsals of Beef, ’twixt two Slabs of Bread?”) That sort of thing offers a distinct and corny pleasure, when done well. And the scenes in which Sontag’s actress picks up a telephone, or sees Central Park, or meets Henry James—well, they are diverting. Nothing more, perhaps. But also nothing less.

Sontag sets the stage of her costume drama reasonably well. The problem with *In America* comes at the more demanding level Sontag announces for it: as morally edifying art, rather than entertainment. The only characters possessing complexity and depth are artists, writers, intellectuals. Their personalities are not exhausted by the roles and actions they perform; their gestures are not frozen into mechanical repetition of their essence as “types.” These are beautiful souls, on whom nothing is lost.

Everyone outside this appointed group—outside the circle of people deemed capable of aesthetic and/or moral exertion—is dead. At least, dead to Sontag’s imagination. That has been the case in her fiction (almost literally so) at least since her second novel. *Death Kit* had at its center a colorless—indeed, unconscious—American engineer whose personality was evidently designed following a blueprint provided by some *Partisan Review* symposium on the mass society. *In America* is a livelier read. But Sontag’s non-intelligentsia remain clichés, stock figures, extras—fit to swell a scene or two, but otherwise inert.

A few are porters or laborers. The beautiful souls consider them with sympathy, and maybe give them a tip: They are bearable because, evidently, they do not say much. The figures embodying America the Vulgar are loquacious enough. They announce that in the United States, you are free—“free to make money.” Average Americans walk up to her and

denounce art, beauty and the theater. They constantly prove themselves to be philistine, all the way to the soles of their industrially produced footwear.

In this, Sontag really is consistent: across four decades of public life; her idea of America has not changed in the least. "After America was 'won,' " she wrote in 1967, "it was filled up by new generations of the poor and built up according to the tawdry fantasy of the good life that culturally deprived, uprooted people might have at the beginning of the industrial era. And the country looks it." (That was during what is sometimes called her "leftist" phase, for reasons some cultural historian may yet be able to explain). It is, in any case, a sentiment that could only be expressed by someone who has never been poor, or worried about the possibility of becoming poor, or otherwise encountered any real obstacle to "the good life."

What seems maddening about *In America* may also be the quality that makes it most interesting, most revealing, as part of Sontag's oeuvre. The book

is sprinkled with countless passages in which the émigrés reflect on the American way of life: little aphorisms about how it is a land of people who have abolished the past, and with it responsibility. "What is paramount in America," one character muses, "is the personal calendar, the personal journey. My birthday, my life, my happiness." And another: "This is America, where nothing is permanent. Nothing supposed to have fixed, unalterable consequences. Everything supposed to move, change, be torn down, mix."

At least a few dozen such passages occur. The theme becomes monotonous: America is untrammelled individualism, a cultural-historical wasteland, a place of perpetual escape. The problem is not that such formulations are untrue, exactly, but that they are truisms—cheap generalizations, false insofar as they are unearned. And they are radically ahistorical. 19th-century America at the time Sontag is writing about was a strange place. Spiritualist mediums helped grief-stricken families communicate with their Civil War

dead—with the benefit of "spirit guides" who were, more often than not, disembodied Native Americans. Black folks were composing lyrics to blues songs that (as Richard Wright later put it) showed a grappling with nihilism worthy of Nietzsche. People were reading in the newspapers about the practice of free love among disciples of French socialist visionary Charles Fourier, and perhaps wondering if the 20th century would be a time of sexual and social revolution. The boundaries between life and art, between tradition and self-creation, were always blurred.

No flicker of this registers in the pages of Sontag's writing. It is probably too much to expect that it might. *In America* works as casual entertainment. It is a pleasant costume drama—production values a little lower than a Merchant-Ivory film, but enjoyable enough. Nothing too extreme. And if Sontag reveals, however unintentionally, that cultural anti-Americanism rests upon a profound failure of the imagination ... well, that is a case of the novel enriching our moral discourse. ■

Dissent

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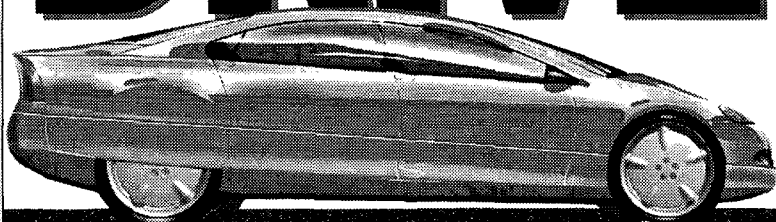
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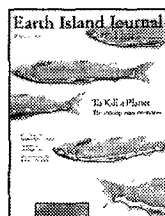
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Continued from page 38

Inevitably, when Gunn left Stanford, he broke with Winters (as did, to varying degrees, the teacher's other students, who included N. Scott Momaday, Robert Pinsky and Donald Hall). He settled in San Francisco and developed an impressively adaptable and flexible poetic range, experimenting with the intricate metrics of free verse while continuing to master traditional forms. But his poetry, no matter its protean shifts over the years, from controlled stanzas on the Roman emperor Julian to sweaty riffs on anal sex and psychedelic drugs, has always retained an exciting, even ferocious, quality of exacting obsession about it.

This consistency has given Gunn a certain credibility when he has turned his attention to questions of love, or at any rate desire, because writing like this requires an integrity that precludes facile yielding to sentimentality: When you're really obsessed and hungry, clichés won't do. The latest collection, *Boss Cupid*, is no different in this regard, as he chronicles "The obsession in which we live, obsession I call / The wood preceding us as we precede it." In quite a few of the new poems, love's demands mutate into a vividly palpable appetite, as in a series of "songs" from the point of view of the serial killer and cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer. Infatuated with a traveler he had lured to his home, the butcher cannot bear it when the guest turns to leave:

Oh do not leave me now.
All that I ever wanted is compressed
In your sole body. As you turn to go
I know that I must keep you, and know how,
For I must hold the ribbed arch of your chest
And taste your boyish glow.

What can be gained from this, other than horror-show kicks? Why try to imagine the point of view of such a total, unalloyed pathology? In another poem, Dahmer remembers with fondness how, as a teenager, he savored the bodies depicted in muscle magazines; how he could dwell in particular on one man's "tan body burnished like a basted fowl / ... And good enough to eat. I was hungry for a life, / Life of my own, life I could own." This hunger is key, and endows Dahmer with a spark of humanity one might think impossible. It has unsettling parallels, too: In a poem on Rimbaud, that prodigal *enfant terrible* "coursed after meaning, meaning of course to trick it," much like the way Dahmer captured his victims—

To the edge of the unintelligible thicket
Where truth becomes the same place as untruth,
And trapped it between the two, awful suspension,
Its whiskers quivering through the Romantic mist ...
For then he ate it, he ate meaning live,
Ate all provincial France ...

For all Rimbaud's throbbingly original experiments, they were informed by a hungry exactitude of method that, perhaps, also happens to best characterize Gunn's intertwined ardor and technical precision. If Gunn made movies instead of poems, he'd be something like a Stanley Kubrick: It's a method that, on the whole wide field of passion, illuminates the thin line separating the awesome wonder of *2001* from the brute violence of *A Clockwork Orange*, or the inspired voraciousness of Rimbaud from the murderous appetite of Jeffrey Dahmer—a feat only the most profound humanists can accomplish.

I recently asked Gunn about the happier side of that thin line, which he has long inhabited, both in his poetic practice and in his personal life. After he left Stanford and began teaching at the University of California at Berkeley, he was careful not to become an academic fixture, declining a full-time professorship and limiting his teaching to just two classes every other term. (He retired last year.) The result is that he has most assuredly "owned" his life, been free to fill it with an experience that today's institutionalized, office-bound poets are often denied; his poems breathe with the life of one who knows his city well, and they are dappled with bikers, cabbies, auto mechanics, bums, prostitutes, undercover cops, pot-smoking bus riders, kids with skateboards, sly and not-so-sly haunters of gay bars. He is the San Francisco poet par excellence, committed to Whitmanesque democratic vistas—and, as the multiple lovers in his poems make readily apparent, Whitmanesque licentiousness.

"Sexual promiscuity makes for a feeling of better democracy," Gunn explains, echoing an attitude shared by a variety of radical queer writers from Samuel Delaney to Sarah Schulman. Public space—and a diversity of individuals inhabiting it—is paramount in this "wonderfully populist" pursuit, so as to maximize opportunities for human, and amorous, interaction. So when I asked the poet his opinion of what has happened to his fair city, in the aftermath of wave upon wave of invading software engineers and investment bankers, he is understandably blue. "It was a blue-collar town when I first came to live here," he says. "But it's really just a city of the rich and of the homeless now—especially in my neighborhood [the Haight-Ashbury]. They're selling houses for \$1 million on this street now, within a few blocks of me. It's horrifying."

Under such circumstances, the chances for love, already tenuous, are even more imperiled when the public sphere is dying. This possibly informs an especially striking poem in *Boss Cupid*, one that evokes squatting—that time-honored direct action to take back space the rich have let languish—as metaphor:

The moment that they break into
The closed-up house of love; they slip
From room to room and, as they do,
Adventure through a companionship

Thick with their projects. What is best,
They know they'll not be bored again,
Proud to return the interest
They get and think they can sustain.

The lovers' furtive sojourn in the "closed-up house of love," from which they inevitably will be evicted, may strike one as a case of terminal romantic pessimism. It therefore may be surprising to learn that Gunn's partner, Mike Kitay, has been with him since the '50s. How to reconcile the seeming paradox between Gunn the tomcat and Gunn the devoted? "It's like having your cake and eating it," Gunn says. "Well that's what I do."

In a poem addressed to Kitay, Gunn declares: "Nothing is, or will ever be, / Mine, I suppose. No one can hold a heart, / But what we hold in trust / We do hold, even apart." That's a genuine sentiment that, if it came from most other poets, couldn't be trusted. We have Gunn's relentless toughness to thank for that—and for reassuring us, no matter how strange it sometimes might seem, that to be lost in the enchanted wood is a marvelous thing. ■

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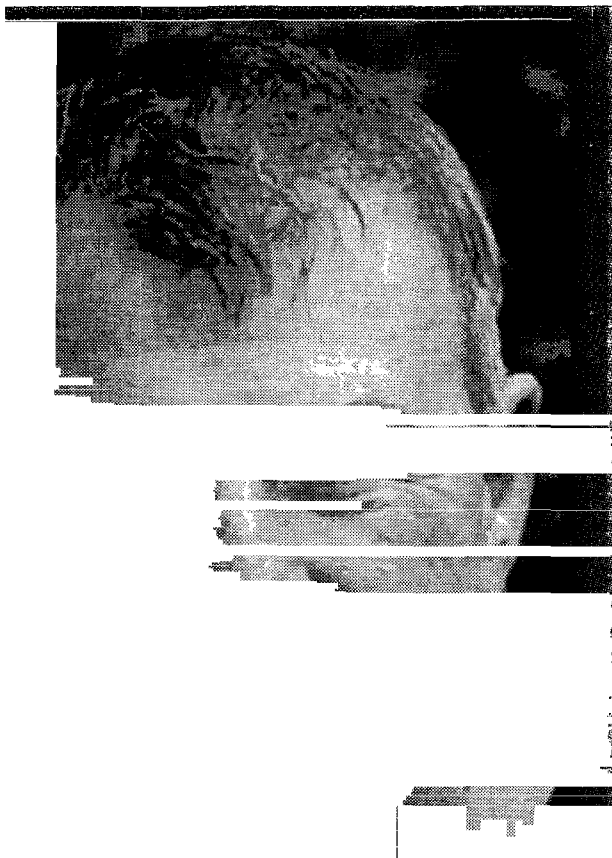
Constant Craving

The obsessions of Thom Gunn

By Joe Knowles

A *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the most sprightly of the Bard's many delights, is a fixture in the schedules of Shakespeare-in-the-Park companies for good reason: What better dramatic pretext for a crowd-pleasing parade of semi-nude fairies and urban dandies, flitting about the woods in gleeful submission to the whims of Cupid?

Originally conceived as light entertainment for a wedding, the play is careful not to tread too heavily on what is, after all, ever-shifting ground: the strange space where lovers meet. And yet for all the elaborate toga-clad romping and what-fools-these-mortals-be whimsy, the catalyst for the play's action is simple and desperate: Lysander and Hermia, enraptured in unsanctioned love, flee Athens for the forest because if they don't, they will be put to death. Even by the time the play gallops toward its happy conclusion, Lysander's rival, Demetrius, only settles for Hermia's companion, Helen, because he has unknowingly succumbed to supernatural coercion. Grave fear, ecstatic joy, high and low comedy, the utter lack of free will: These are contained and conflated in deceptive simplicity, a tightly tangled knot of emotional processes the culture at large calls "love." In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare got it right, as few writers do, detangling the knot—careful not to tear the string—with consummate skill.



Which must be why poet Thom Gunn, who chose *Boss Cupid* for the title of his new book, is inevitably drawn back to that durable 400-year-old play. "A Wood near Athens," one of the new collection's major pieces, begins with a series of statements that recall the comedy's many amorous chases: "The traveler struggles through a wood. He is lost. / The traveler is at home. He never left." Lovers are surely eternal travelers in an enchanted wood, and on a peculiar voyage at that, both bewitching and unnerving in its mystery. It's a mystery that Gunn, in his own way, has been probing on and off for more than four decades.

Not to say that Thom Gunn is a "love poet" in the usual sense; far from it. Barely out of Cambridge, the young Gunn came out swinging with his first book, *Fighting Terms* (1954), which had little use for dainty sensitivities. One of its poems addresses a lover so: "Abandon me to stammering, and go; / If you have tears, prepare to cry elsewhere— / I know of no emotion we can share." In another poem, a couple might as well be rival generals:

And love is then no more than a compromise?
An impermanent treaty waiting to be signed
By the two enemies?
—While the calculating Cupid feigning impartial blind
Drafts it, promising peace, both leaders wise
To his antics sign but secretly double their spies.

With this kind of talk, the young Englishman with the bristling intelligence emerged as a literary tough, both for his anti-sentimentalism and his hard, formal rhythms. Soon, when he moved to America to attend graduate school at Stanford University, he found encouragement to keep going in this direction from his new teacher Yvor Winters, a poet who, Gunn later wrote, "knew no antithesis between poetry and the workings of reason." That is not to say he lacked passion; rather, as Gunn put it in a poem addressed to Winters in his next collection, *The Sense of Movement* (1957):

You keep both Rule and Energy in view,
Much power in each, most in the balanced two:
Ferocity existing in the fence
Built by an exercised intelligence.

Ferocity is the word: In Gunn's memoir of Winters (reprinted in the prose collection *Shelf Life*), he remembers the shock he felt when he first sat through the elder poet's lecture that methodically and passionately trashed Yeats—one of Gunn's idols. "I was angry at first and fought him bitterly," Gunn writes. But, despite their contests, he quickly came to learn from and appreciate Winters—for, above all, his "knowledge of what is *behind* a poem, what makes a poet want to write in the first place. ... It is something many critics cannot grasp, that—what?—sense of urgency and of intensity, of being possessed by the subject."

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